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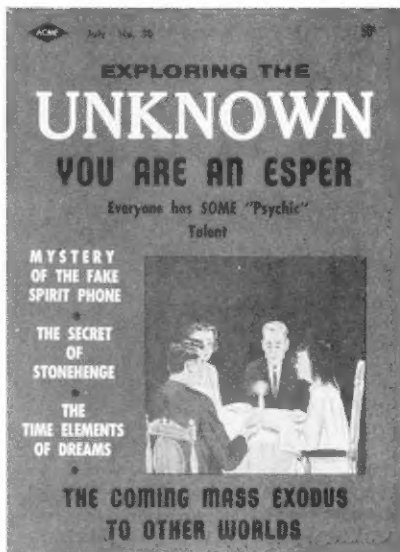
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magazine of **HORROR**

Strange Tales and Science Fiction

Volume 2

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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Introduction

In our January issue, we ran two science fiction tales, **The Thing From — Outside**, by George Allan England, and **A Way With Kids**, by Ed M. Clinton. The first was a strange tale with a touch of horror; the second was modern, slightly-futuristic science fiction combining humor and unpleasantness. We did this deliberately to test your feelings — not only to science fiction alone, but types of science fiction.

The results are both interesting and instructive. One reader considered the England story outstanding; two readers gave that rating to the Clinton. Four readers disliked each story. However, less than one-third of you put England in the second division in your ratings (there were eight stories) while more than half put Clinton in the second division — and a fair number of these votes included notes to the effect that the story was a good one by itself, but you didn't feel it belonged in **Magazine of Horror**.

As a reader, we were not sure; we liked the story, but as an editor, we had to find out. Now we know — until and unless further evidence suggests we run another test.

In the April issue, **The Garrison**, by David Grinnell, a modern-type science fiction tale with strange and perhaps frightening undertones, came out in 5th place — but only one point separated it from the 4th place spot. Two of you disliked it, but one-sixth of you put it in first place. Tentative conclusion: this type of story **might** go once in a while; use only with caution.

Now do you see how your votes can make a difference?

Robert A. W. Lowndes

The Girl At Heddon's

by Pauline Kappel Prilucik

One of the oldest of tales is the story of the young man who encounters a lovely-looking girl under mysterious circumstances, a girl who seems to be a prisoner, and around whom hovers a terrible secret. On the surface it would seem that nothing more can possibly be done with this theme; yet, the theme was old long before there were such things as printed magazines. The essential ingredient for success here is in the author's treatment of atmosphere, and the nature of the secret to be revealed at the end. If the secret is all there is, then we have nothing more than a riddle; if there is nothing more than atmosphere, then we have a reader-cheater; if there are no clues given at all, then it will seem as if the author had no idea when the story was begun; if the indications are underlined too heavily, then the shock-value is undermined — although atmosphere and character might still save the story. All in all, this theme is loaded with traps; our inclusion of *The Girl at Heddon's* testifies to our belief that the author has evaded them.

Pauline Kappel Prilucik has spent some time in Europe collecting material on supernatural manifestations and folklore, on the basis of which she put together an anthology some years back — a publisher is yet to be found, she tells us. She is a member of the Mystery Writers of America, and has appeared in ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. She says, "I'm a teacher, have two children, and write, and (without much optimism) hope that someone cares to read what I write."

MICHAEL LENNER shuddered and gripped the wheel tighter. The mist nuzzled the car like a curious, gray lum-

bering beast; ragged, ghostly fingers leaped and clawed the black ribbon of road in front of the headlights to escape the

piercing glare. Morbidly playful, the fog enveloped the car like a moist, chilling embryonic sack. Michael, straining to follow the white line in the center of the road, sat tense and silent in the speeding roadster.

The young man sitting beside Michael half turned. He bit his lip hesitantly, then said reproachfully, "This is crazy. Of all the nights to go on the prowl! How do you talk me into things like this?"

Lost in thoughts of his own, Michael hunched over the wheel without answering. They drove on in silence another ten minutes or so, then Michael edged the car to the side of the road.

"This is it," he murmured, switching off the ignition. He swung open the car door and got out.

There was a fence along the road and then a slight incline, dense with shaggy underbrush. In the distance loomed a black mass of farm buildings and a strange, unusually high fieldstone tower.

Joe Carnes grunted with misgivings and followed Michael reluctantly. They paused at a sagging split rail fence. *No Trespassing* signs were posted on every tree and pole.

Joe whistled. "Somebody doesn't want company, Mike."

Michael didn't answer. He slung a leg over the fence and slipped to the other side.

"Hey," protested Joe, "You want to get us shot?"

"Wait'll you see her," Michael's voice was eager. "She's beautiful"

"Beautiful enough to get shot for?"

"Maybe." Michael parted the moist, shiny, black foliage and plunged into the tangled undergrowth. Joe sighed and followed.

The night was thick and heavy with darkness; shriveled autumn leaves slithered crackling under their shoes. Their faces dripped with beads of moisture. At the top of the incline Michael held up his hand.

"This is where I saw her," he whispered.

Joe wrapped his arms around himself to keep from shivering and whispered hoarsely, "You are crazy! I should have known! You actually think some girl is going to go romping through the fields at midnight on a sloshy night like this?" He shook his head and mumbled, "She'd have to be even crazier than you."

"Look!" Michael's voice was tight with excitement.

Standing at the edge of a small windbreak forest of pines was a girl. She stepped out lightly, lithely, rhythmically, like a cautious, frolicking fawn. Her head was thrown back; her hair clung in dark wet strands to her face. She wore a glistening plastic raincoat.

Michael felt his breath catch in his throat. His pulse quickened. He laid a hand on Joe's arm. "Wait here. I'm going to talk to her."

"Not without me! This I want to see!"

"You may scare her."

"With that look in your eye," whispered Joe, "you may scare her."

Michael shrugged. "Oh, all right. Come on."

They trudged through the spongy meadow grass toward the girl. She seemed to hear their footsteps the moment they moved out of the brush; immediately she turned on her heels as if to flee.

"Please, Miss," Michael called softly, "Don't run away. Please . . ."

She hesitated. They came within fifteen feet of her.

"Don't be afraid," said Michael.

"I'm not afraid," she responded in a voice that thrilled him.

Michael swallowed hard. "I saw you the other night when I stopped to fix a flat back there on the road." He waved vaguely in the direction from which he and Joe had come.

"I know. I saw you, too."

"I couldn't forget you," Michael blurted out. "I had to come again."

She lifted her face to the misty glow of the night and regarded them with uninhibited, childlike curiosity.

"Do you live near here?" asked Michael.

"Yes. This is my father's land."

"But we've never seen you before," said Joe. "Didn't you go to school in town?"

"No."

"You're kidding," scoffed Joe.

"No," she replied earnestly, "I have never left my father's land."

Joe shook his head. "This is absolutely crazy! Things like this don't happen in the twentieth century!"

"Why haven't you been off the farm?" Michael approached a little closer.

"My father doesn't want me to."

"He must be crazy," crowed Joe.

"Shut up, Joe," growled Michael. He took a few more steps toward the girl. "Why? Is he mean to you?"

She laughed. "My father? Oh no! He's very good to me. He brings me everything I want."

"But you're like a prisoner," exclaimed Michael.

She paused thoughtfully. "Yes and no." She shrugged. "I have everything I need."

"I still think she's pulling our leg," said Joe.

SHE SMILED at them both and brushed the hair away from her eyes.

Michael's heart gave a hollow thump. "What's your name?"

"Vert. Vert Heddon."

"Will your father let me come to see you?"

"No." There was something very final in her tone.

"Can I ask him tomorrow?"

She shrugged again. "You'd be wasting your time."

"But he can't expect to keep you isolated on this farm all your life," exploded Michael.

She shook her head to indicate that he didn't understand. Then, gathering her raincoat about her, she said apologetically, "I'll have to go now."

"Can I come again at night then?"

She paused. "I would like to say yes, but I know I must answer no. It wouldn't be wise."

"I don't feel wise," commented Michael warmly. "I just know I want to see you again. Please Vert, say it will be all right."

She flashed him another smile that made him tingle to his very toes. "It will *not* be all right. My father wouldn't like it. Good night." And before Michael could utter a word of protest, she had vanished into the dark shadows of the pine forest.

Michael stood stunned, speechless, his eyes strained to see some sign of the girl beneath the trees.

Finally Joe whistled through

his teeth and declared, "What a dish!"

"I never saw anyone so beautiful — so beautiful and strange," Michael mumbled in a numb, bewildered voice.

The explosion of a shotgun suddenly shattered the stillness. A voice as ominous as the shot rang through the darkness.

"Hands high!"

Both young men raised their arms. A middle-aged farmer stepped out of the pines. He lowered the gun when he was within ten feet of them and said slowly, "I want you boys to understand this . . ." He lifted the muzzle of the gun slightly, making them catch their breath a second time. "I put up those 'No Trespassing' signs for a good reason. I aim to shoot anyone who disregards them. I don't take kindly to lawbreakers."

"Listen, sir . . ." Michael tried to lower his hands and approach him. The farmer lifted the gun and aimed it straight at Michael's head. Michael backed away.

"Now you boys turn around and head back to the road. Next time you mount that fence you rest assured — you may walk in, but you're going to have to be *carried* out!"

Joe gave Michael a nudge. "Let's hit the road, friend."

MICHAEL NODDED. They

backed away from the farmer and ran back to where the car was parked. They got inside and lit their cigarettes with trembling fingers.

"There's something awfully wrong here," reflected Michael slowly.

"You're not kidding! Let's get out of here and at least make that much right."

"What about the girl?"

"Damn it! Start the motor," screamed Joe. "I don't want him to change his mind and blast us anyway!"

"He's practically keeping the girl a prisoner."

"Oh, come on!" scoffed Joe. "That kind of stuff went out a hundred years ago. He's just not keen on her having any boy friends. He probably thinks three — especially four, is a crowd."

"I think its more than that. There's something wrong here. I feel it."

"Who cares," snapped Joe. "It's not our business!"

"I care." Michael turned on the ignition. "I've got to talk to her again."

"Are you kidding?" Joe glared at him incredulously. "You want to win the Pulitzer Prize for stupidity?"

"I've got to know if she's happy here. If she wants to get away and can't — I've got to help her."

"You're crazy!" Joe turned away from Michael in irritation

and refused to say another word until they reached town. He hopped out of the car in front of his house and reiterated his decision. "You're crazy!"

He slammed the car door shut and disappeared up the steps of his house. Michael sat at the curb and felt full of misgivings and doubt. At no time in his life had he ever gotten involved in such a strange, uncanny business. And — regardless of what Joe thought — he was *involved*. Vert, in those few brief moments of contact, had captivated him. He found himself full of unfamiliar longings and desires. He was obsessed with her image; he could not wipe her glowing, wild, uniquely fresh face from his memory. Perhaps she was a prisoner — he didn't know. But he did know that now, after tonight's encounter, *he* was a prisoner! He was most certainly a prisoner of his own emotions. He must see her again!

THE NEXT NIGHT, Michael sat crouching in the brush of the Heddon farm a whole hour before he caught a glimpse of Vert strolling through the meadow. She strode along whipping the air with a pine branch, and, as she approached, he heard her humming a soft, crooning little tune. She was not at all startled when he parted the branches of the underbrush and stepped out.

She waited for him to join her. "I thought you would come." She smiled engagingly. "But you mustn't stay. My father meant everything he said."

"That he'd shoot me?"

"Yes."

Michael moved closer. "You take it very lightly. I was hoping you'd care a little if I got shot or not."

"You're very nice. Of course I care. That's why I'm telling you to go."

"Could you take a ride with me some evening? I wouldn't keep you out long — just as long as you want."

"No. I can't leave the farm."

"Why not? I worried about you all night. Do you want to get away? Can I help you? I'll do anything . . ."

Michael's voice was so intense, so sincere, that she appeared much affected by his offer. She reached out to touch him but quickly drew back her hand. He grabbed her hand. She wrenched it away.

"Don't touch me!"

Michael put his hands in his pockets and said softly, "I don't know how I can make you understand. I never felt this way about a girl before. I've only seen you twice before, both times at night, but already every line of your face is etched in my memory. All last night I kept remembering your face. I would have explod-

ed if I hadn't been able to come out here to see you tonight. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

She turned away and hid her face. "I'm not going to listen to you."

Exasperated, Michael pleaded, "What's wrong here?"

She swung around to face him and shouted, "My father won't let me see you! He won't let me see anybody!"

"Why not?"

"I don't know!"

She began to sob hysterically. Michael took her into his arms. She clung to him and wept. He could taste the salt of her tears against his lips. Over and over he whispered, "Let me help you. Let me help you."

Slowly her sobbing subsided. Michael gave her his handkerchief and she dried her eyes. As she handed it back to him he took her hand and lifted it to his lips; her hand felt coarse and grainy. The hard, jagged surface of her nails scratched his mouth. He caught both her hands to examine them.

"What's wrong with your hands?"

Quickly she drew away and clenched them behind her back. "Nothing! Nothing is wrong with them!"

"They feel so rough."

"I suppose it's from gardening. They've just gotten that way lately."

"Let me see them," demanded Michael.

"No!"

She suddenly spun on her heels and ran from him, disappearing into the same dark clump of trees that had swallowed her the night before.

MICHAEL STOOD bewildered, and, when he turned, almost bumped into her father. The farmer still held the gun, but this time it was not pointing at Michael.

Unexpectedly, he laid it down on the ground and sat despondently on a stump. "Young man," he said sadly, "You can spare us all grief by staying away."

"Listen, sir—" Michael squatted down in front of him—"I don't mean her any harm. I would like to call on her with your permission, sir; I don't want to sneak around like this. I've never done anything like this before, but I just had to see her. I can't get her out of my head. May I see her tomorrow during the day?"

The farmer shook his head with grim finality.

"I'll see her right here on the farm if you want," pleaded Michael. "I'll do anything you say."

"Then," said the farmer, "stay away. You're creating problems in the girl's life for which there are no solutions!"

Michael fixed his attention on Heddon's grizzled face—a face troubled by a mixture of pain and anxiety.

"She can't do the things other girls do—or at least she won't be able to for long," added Heddon, his voice almost faded away entirely.

Michael blinked in bewilderment. "Is she sick?"

Heddon nodded.

"What is it? Can't she be helped? I have some money—perhaps a specialist . . ."

The father shook his head despondently. "It is hopeless. Nothing can be done."

"But surely . . ."

The farmer interrupted vehemently, "I tell you it's hopeless! The girl is beyond help!"

"I can't believe that," Michael protested hotly, growing angry in spite of all contrary intentions. "She looks well."

"It's a different kind of sickness."

"Different how?" Michael persisted.

"I think we've talked enough," Heddon snapped. He rose to his feet and faced Michael. "I want you to leave her alone. I mean that," he added menacingly. "I intend to protect her from pointless entanglements that will only make her life more difficult!"

"But that's not fair!" cried Michael. "She needs friends! You can't keep her just for yourself! It's not fair to Vert!"

"You don't understand!" Heddon's face flickered with ill-concealed anger and impatience. "She's *very* ill!"

Michael stared at him aghast. "She isn't going to die?"

Heddon met his eyes coldly and said in a voice that chilled Michael to the bone, "I wish it were as simple as that."

Without another word, the man picked up his gun and walked away toward the shadowy cluster of farm buildings.

Michael found his way back to the car. A strange mixture of longing and dread flooded his entire system. The mystery enveloping this girl completely dumbfounded him. What was wrong with her? He had to find out! Where could he begin? Of course! He should have thought of it right away. His uncle, Fred Lenner, was the man to see. He was the oldest doctor in town; for the first thirty years of his practice he had been the only physician within a hundred mile radius. Doc's knowledge of the natives in this small, close-mouthed New England district was unparalleled. It was logical that he might be the one man able to help him penetrate the heavy veil of mystery that isolated the Heddon Farm, on that forgotten country lane, from all the other farms in the area.

DOC LENNER greeted his

nephew warmly, but almost immediately his expression of pleasure was replaced by a grave look of concern. "What is it, Michael? Something troubling you?"

"Yes, but it's nothing you can give me a pill for."

"Ah . . ." Lenner patted him on the shoulder — "then it must be a matter of love."

"No. Well, yes . . . Well, not exactly . . ."

The old man chuckled. "Yes," he confirmed, "it must be a bad case of *love*."

Michael plunged directly into the core of his problem.

"I saw a girl the other night, uncle. A beautiful girl! She was in a field in the middle of the night. I tried to talk to her twice now, but her father keeps running me off the property."

"He sounds like a sensible, proper-type father," teased the elderly doctor.

"He said she was sick — that it would be useless to see her again."

"Who are they?"

"The girl said her name was Heddon."

A retrospective frown clouded the older man's face.

"You know them?" Michael studied his uncle's expression anxiously. "Have you ever treated her?"

"No," said Lenner slowly, as if rethreading his way through

the tangled maze of bygone years. "At least — not since the day she was born."

"When was that? What happened?"

"I guess it was about twenty years ago — maybe a little less. I came in one morning and found a farmer in the waiting room. He was the most frantic, woeful looking man I had ever seen. He held a newborn infant in his arms. Without giving me a chance to take off my coat, he followed me into the consulting room and begged me to examine his child."

"What was wrong with the baby?" Michael nervously lit a cigarette.

"Nothing! But the father couldn't bring himself to believe it. He asked me again and again if the baby was absolutely normal. I assured him repeatedly that it was as healthy and lovely as any baby I had ever seen. He clutched my hands and broke into tears of relief and gratitude. I remember the incident so well because when he had left with the child I found a hundred dollar bill on the examination table — very unusual thing to happen in those days."

"Where was the baby's mother?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell me. He said she didn't require any medical attention. All in all he was very vague

about the whole thing. I gathered that he feared the baby might have inherited some terrible affliction from which the mother suffered."

"You never heard anyone else mention them?" asked Michael.

"No. Of course I know that there is a family named Heddon a few miles out of town on the old country road. I don't know if there is a Mrs. Heddon or not. I don't think anyone knows much about them. Lenner watched Michael's troubled face silently a moment, then asked, "This Heddon girl — what does she look like?"

"She's lovely! The most beautiful girl I've ever seen! There's something spritelike about her, a kind of magic and charm that flits through your fingers and imbeds itself in your mind."

"And in your heart?" The doctor smiled.

Michael crushed his cigarette in the ashtray. "What kind of disease could she have, uncle? Her father is positive she can't be treated."

"Some of these old farmers are very set in their ways. Many still don't put much stock in this new-fangled trade of medicine. You should know how thick we New Englanders can be, Michael."

"Isn't it possible that Vert inherited her mother's illness

without it being evident at the time of her birth?"

"Very possible," admitted Lenner. "Especially so because I never found out what it was Mrs. Heddon did suffer from. Many congenital diseases can't be detected from a superficial examination. Tests have to be made — clinical tests."

"Perhaps Mrs. Heddon's disease was incurable twenty years ago — but that doesn't mean it couldn't be treated today. Maybe Mr. Heddon isn't even aware of the progress medicine has made!"

"It's possible," agreed the doctor. "Of course we'd have to take a look at her. Who knows what sort of trouble she may have."

"If I can convince Mr. Heddon to bring her in, would you examine her, uncle?"

The doctor smiled and nodded. "I'll be here when you need me."

Michael jumped up and tore out of the office. He stopped by the house for Joe and they drove out to the Heddon farm.

IT WAS JUST a little after noon when Michael, accompanied by Joe Carnes drove into the Heddon yard. The chickens ran squawking away from the wheels. The geese scolded angrily from the sidelines. Michael jumped out of the car and ran to the screen door of the farmhouse. He tapped im-

patiently, looking around him as he waited.

The farm was tidily kept and in good repair. It was composed of four buildings, all clustered around the barnyard where the car was parked. Straight across from the farmhouse was an old, rambling, clapboard barn with sloping corners and sagging roof. A low, neat poultry house with a high, chicken wire fence was connected to the barn. Somewhat behind the henhouse, but still in plain view of the house, was the odd, massively constructed fieldstone tower he had seen a few days earlier from the road. It reminded Michael a little of the towers of Medieval fortresses that he had seen in pictures.

The tower had a heavy hand-hewn oak door with a large, old-fashioned iron bolt on the outside that was slid shut. Michael looked back at Joe who still sat in the car and saw that his eyes too were glued with misgivings on that particular building.

Michael took the handle of the screen door in his hand rattled it.

"Who's there?" Heddon's voice cut through the gloom within the house.

"Could I talk with you a minute, sir?"

"Who is it?"

"Michael Lenner, sir. I was in your field last night." Mich-

ael could not keep his voice from quaking.

The farmer appeared at the door. His face was full of shadows from the dim, dreary interior light.

"I thought I made everything perfectly clear last night," he said briskly.

"Mr. Heddon, please listen to me." Michael took a deep breath and the words tumbled out before the farmer could protest. "I spoke with my uncle this morning — Doc Lenner. He knows you. You went to him when Vert was a baby."

The farmer scratched his chin and grumbled "Yes — and you can tell him from me — he was a fool!"

"I don't know what's the matter with your daughter, sir, but if you'd just let a doctor look at her — maybe she could be helped." Michael swallowed and gazed hopefully into the farmer's face. "Medicine has progressed. A lot can be done to help people whose cases were hopeless years back. Vert may not have to suffer like her mother . . ."

"What do you know about her mother?"

"Nothing, sir. Only you seem to suspect Vert is suffering from the same disease. Maybe it's not hopeless like you think."

The farmer began laughing. It was the most dreadful, despondent, despair-filled laugh Michael had ever heard. With-

out warning, the laugh turned into hacking, uncontrollable sobbing. Michael looked back at Joe in confusion. He tried to talk to Heddon again, but the man was beside himself with a grief very near hysteria.

"Where is Vert, Mr. Heddon. Please let me talk to her. Let her decide. Let her decide if she wants to come into town to see my uncle. Please, Mr. Heddon, please . . ." Michael waited, holding his breath while the farmer collected himself.

HEDDON SHOOK his head. "You are kind, young man. I can see that you care. I thank you." Heddon gasped. He seemed to be struggling for breath.

"But where is she?" shouted Michael.

"I have sent her away," muttered the farmer mechanically.

"No!" Michael spun about and his eyes searched the area frantically for some sign of her. "I don't believe you!" He spied the fieldstone tower. "You keep her prisoner! You have her locked in there!"

The farmer's eyes flickered with frenzy. His face grew pale with panic. "No! No! No! Get off my land! Get off my land!"

Michael shoved him aside and ran toward the strange building. Joe jumped out of the car and followed him. Heddon began to pursue them,

but halfway across the yard he dropped to his knees and began clawing the earth in despair. Finally he slumped to the ground.

Michael drew back the bolt of the oak door. It moved easily with an empty, clanging sound. He pushed the door open.

There was a small square room filled with bales of peat-moss. The floor of the room was slimy and spotted with streaks of mushroom clusters that grew in the sour smelling cracks of heaving earth. From somewhere came the sound of dripping water. The stench of damp, festering air was overwhelming.

On the right was a circular stone staircase twisting its dank and mossy way to the second story. Toward the rear was another door. It stood a few inches ajar Michael saw it led down to the cellar.

He moved toward the open door. Joe tried to restrain him, and being unsuccessful, followed him. Wooden steps (the edges of which had long since rotted and crumbled away) led down into the cavernous black hollow. A shiny rivulet of black river cascaded down the steps near the wall.

Michael stepped onto the first step and tried his weight on it. The board wailed and creaked, but it did not collapse. He tried the next step. His

hand groped along the earth wall beside the stairs. Joe followed reluctantly. They descended slowly into this strange, grave-like cellar, lighting matches along the way.

On the bottom they found that the walls and floors were of earth. A dark, frothing, underground spring severed the floor area and gurgled dissonantly through a clay pipe that had been inserted into the earth wall.

The cellar appeared empty. They scanned the corners, the rough crevices where boulders protruded beyond the wall. No one was in the cellar.

Joe pulled on Michael's sleeve and started back up the stairs. Michael turned to follow. The wood of the stairs was spongy from the damp, corrosive atmosphere of the cellar. The steps groaned and hissed under Joe's weight. Michael bent forward and strained to hear. There was another sound! A sound of scraping, like sticks scratching a shingle roof.

Joe looked back at him. It was obvious he had caught the sound too. "What do you think that was?" His voice quavered unsteadily.

Michael peered reluctantly down at the uninviting darkness of the cellar. "I don't know. It sounded like branches scraping on a wall. Maybe the wind has picked up outside."

"You kidding! How would

you hear it down here? There aren't any windows." Joe waved to Michael to follow him. "Let's get out of here."

They mounted two more steps. The brushing sound picked up intensity. They stopped to listen.

"Could the girl be down here somewhere — maybe tied up or something?" whispered Joe.

They stared at each other in horror. Joe rose to the next step. There was a dull, wheezing crunch. The board of the step collapsed and dropped in the dark hollow behind the stairs.

"Are you all right?" cried Michael, bracing his friend.

THE SCRAPING sound, a sound almost as if someone were sweeping with an old-fashioned brush broom, was distinctly louder. Joe took out his book of matches and struck one. The pale flickering glow bit timidly into the dismal gloom. Michael grabbed Joe's wrist and pushed it closer to the opening created by the fallen board. Wildly, furiously, the intensity of the scratching increased! The matchlight fluttered and extinguished!

Michael grabbed the book of matches out of Joe's hand and lit another. He thrust his hand into the opening and peered inside. His eyes strained to penetrate the wall of shadows.

Suddenly the little flame sputtered and threw a glow on something moving in a dark corner. He saw — and the gasp strangled in his throat!

Crouched in that far corner under the stairs was a tree! Yet it was not a tree — its branches were waving like tentacled arms. Its wooden bark-covered legs were rooted fibrously into the soil beneath it. The whole body was a massive trunk structure covered with nubbly, coarse, flaking brown bark . . . and this tree had a face! A woman's face!

Michael was trembling with fear, but he had to see. He lit another match. The face looked toward them — a face filled with sorrow.

Their presence and the light seemed to excite the Tree Woman. The barren brittle branches thrashed about her violently. A kind of wooing, wailing whistle seemed to escape the hideous mouth. The hair, a kind of stringy moss or fungus, hung in gray strands about her forehead.

A rat, frightened by their intrusion, scurried across the floor and burrowed into the base of the semi-human tree form. The eyes of the unfortunate Tree Woman stared down in dismay. Michael gasped. Joe turned away and leaned sobbing against the wall.

A woman's scream pierced

the air. Michael's eyes darted to the steps above Joe. Vert stood there, her eyes wide with horror.

"What is it?" Her whole body shook with fear and revulsion. "What is it?"

SUDDEN LANTERN light dissolved the darkness. At the head of the stairs stood Vert's father — his face streaked with tears and ashen white. His voice coiled round them and echoed in the hollow below. "I warned you! I warned you!" He approached slowly, laboriously. "I wanted to spare you," he wailed, his eyes fixed sorrowfully on Vert. "I tried to keep it from you as long as I could."

"What do you mean?" Vert grasped his arm. "What has that *thing* down there to do with me?"

"Your . . . your mother!"

Heddon crumpled limply on the steps. Joe caught the light and lifted it high. Michael looked at Vert . . .

Weak, exhausted, he slumped back against the wall. Somewhere, someone was screaming. Vert. Her hands were pressed trembling to her temples.

Vert's hands were already the color of tree bark. Her fingernails were crusty with bark cells. Her ankles were brown and flaky with bark. . . . And Michael Lenner knew that the child of that mother was gradually, steadily beginning to resemble the grotesque Tree Woman. And he, Michael, knew — as did Heddon — that there was nothing that man, nor science, nor all the powers musterable by man and his mind, could do to stop this transformation.



The Torture of Hope

by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam

Described as an eccentric with a touch of genius, the Comte de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (Phillipe Auguste Mathias, 1838-1889) is credited with having inaugurated the Symbolist movement in French literature. Two volumes of short stories, *Contes cruels* (1883 and 1889) are regarded as the finest of his fiction, containing as they do every classic quality of the French *conte*, as well as many of the elements to be found in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Ernst Hoffman.

Our thanks to THOMAS DILLEY for requesting the present story.

MANY YEARS AGO, as evening was closing in, the venerable Pedro Arbuez d'Espila, sixth prior of the Dominicans of Segovia, and third Grand Inquisitor of Spain, followed by a *fra redemptor*, and preceded by two familiars of the Holy Office, the latter carrying lanterns, made their way to a subterranean dungeon. The bolt of a massive door creaked, and

they entered a mephitic *in pace*, where the dim light revealed between rings fastened to the wall a bloodstained rack, a brazier, and a jug. On a pile of straw, loaded with fetters and his neck encircled by an iron carcan, sat a haggard man, of uncertain age, clothed in rags.

This prisoner was no other than Rabbi Aser Abarbanel, a Jew of Aragon, who — accused

of usury and pitiless scorn for the poor — had been daily subjected to torture for more than a year. Yet "his blindness was as dense as his hide," and he refused to deny his faith.

Proud of a filiation dating back thousands of years, proud of his ancestors — for all Jews worthy of the name are vain of their blood — he descended Talmudically from Othoniel and consequently from Ipsiboa, the wife of the last judge of Israel, a circumstance which had sustained his courage amid incessant torture. With tears in his eyes at the thought of this resolute soul rejecting salvation, the venerable Pedro Arbuez d'Espila, approaching the shuddering rabbi, addressed him as follows:

"My son, rejoice: your trials here below are about to end. If in the presence of such obstinacy I was forced to permit, with deep regret, the use of great severity, my task of fraternal correction has its limits. You are the fig tree which, having failed so many times to bear fruit, at last withered, but God alone can judge your soul. Perhaps Infinite Mercy will shine upon you at the last moment! We must hope so. There are examples. So sleep in peace to-night. Tomorrow you will be included in the *auto da fe*: that is, you will be exposed to the *quemadero*, the symbolic flames of the Everlasting Fire: it burns,

as you know, only at a distance, my son; and Death is at least two hours (often three) in coming, on account of the wet, iced bandages with which we protect the heads and hearts of the condemned. There will be forty-three of you. Placed in the last row you will have time to invoke God and offer to Him this baptism of fire, which is of the Holy Spirit. Hope in the Light, and rest."

WITH THESE words, having signed to his companions to unchain the prisoner, the prior tenderly embraced him. Then came the turn of the *fra redemptor*, who, in a low tone, entreated the Jew's forgiveness for what he had made him suffer for the purpose of redeeming him; then the two familiars silently kissed him. This ceremony over, the captive was left, solitary and bewildered, in the darkness.

Rabbi Aser Abarbanel, with parched lips and visage worn by suffering, at first gazed at the closed door with vacant eyes. Closed? The word unconsciously roused a vague fancy in his mind, the fancy that he had seen for an instant the light of the lanterns through a chink between the door and the wall. A morbid idea of hope, due to the weakness of his brain, stirred his whole being. He dragged himself toward the strange appearance. Then, very gently

and cautiously, slipping one finger into the crevice, he drew the door toward him. Marvelous! By an extraordinary accident the familiar who closed it had turned the huge key an instant before it struck the stone casing, so that the rusty bolt not having entered the hole, the door again rolled on its hinges.

The rabbi ventured to glance outside. By the aid of a sort of luminous dusk he distinguished at first a semicircle of walls indented by winding stairs; and opposite to him, at the top of five or six stone steps, a sort of black portal, opening into an immense corridor, whose first arches only were visible from below.

Stretching himself flat he crept to the threshold. Yes, it was really a corridor, but endless in length. A wan light illumined it: lamps suspended from the vaulted ceiling lightened at intervals the dull hue of the atmosphere — the distance was veiled in shadow. Not a single door appeared in the whole extent! Only on one side, the left, heavily grated loopholes, sunk in the walls, admitted a light which must be that of evening, for crimson bars at intervals rested on the flags of the pavement. What a terrible silence! Yet, yonder, at the far end of that passage there might be a doorway of escape! The Jew's vacillating hope was tenacious, for it was the last one.

Without hesitating, he ventured on the flags, keeping close under the loopholes, trying to make himself part of the blackness of the long walls. He advanced slowly, dragging himself along on his breast, forcing back the cry of pain when some raw wound sent a keen pang through his whole body.

Suddenly the sound of a sandaled foot approaching reached his ears. He trembled violently, fear stifled him, his sight grew dim. Well, it was over, no doubt. He pressed himself into a niche and, half lifeless with terror, waited.

It was a familiar hurrying along. He passed swiftly by, holding in his clenched hand an instrument of torture — a frightful figure — and vanished. The suspense which the rabbi had endured seemed to have suspended the functions of life, and he lay nearly an hour unable to move. Fearing an increase of tortures if he were captured, he thought of returning to his dungeon. But the old hope whispered in his soul that divine *perhaps*, which comforts us in our sorest trials. A miracle had happened. He could doubt no longer. He began to crawl toward the chance of escape. Exhausted by suffering and hunger, trembling with pain, he pressed onward. The sepulchral corridor, seemed to lengthen mysteriously, while he, still advancing, gazed into the gloom

where there must be some avenue of escape.

Oh! oh! He again heard footsteps, but this time they were slower, more heavy. The white and black forms of two inquisitors appeared, emerging from the obscurity beyond. They were conversing in low tones, and seemed to be discussing some important subject, for they were gesticulating vehemently.

At this spectacle Rabbi Aser Abarbanel closed his eyes; his heart beat so violently that it almost suffocated him; his rags were damp with the cold sweat of agony. He lay motionless by the wall, his mouth wide open, under the rays of a lamp, praying to the God of David.

JUST OPPOSITE to him the two inquisitors paused under the light of the lamp — doubtless owing to some accident due to the course of their argument. One, while listening to his companion, gazed at the rabbi! And, beneath that look — whose absence of expression the hapless man did not at first notice — he fancied he again felt the burning pincers scorch his flesh, he was to be once more a living wound. Fainting, breathless, with fluttering eyelids, he shivered at the touch of the monk's floating robe. But — strange, yet natural fact — the inquisitor's gaze was evidently that of a man deeply ab-

sorbed in his intended reply, engrossed by what he was hearing; his eyes were fixed — and seemed to look at the Jew without seeing him.

In fact, after the lapse of a few minutes, the two gloomy figures slowly pursued their way, still conversing in low tones, toward the place whence the prisoner had come. *He had not been seen!* Amid the horrible confusion of the rabbi's thoughts, the idea darted through his brain: "Can I be already dead that they did not see me?" A hideous impression roused him from his lethargy: in looking at the wall against which his face was pressed, he imagined he beheld two fierce eyes watching him! He flung his head back in a sudden frenzy of fright, his hair fairly bristling! Yet, no! No. His hand groped over the stones: it was the reflection of the inquisitor's eyes, which had been reflected from two spots on the wall.

Forward! He must hasten toward that goal which he fancied (absurdly, no doubt) to be deliverance, toward the darkness from which he was now barely thirty paces distant. He pressed forward faster on his knees, his hands, at full length, dragging himself painfully along, and soon entered the dark portion of this terrible corridor.

SUDDENLY THE poor wretch felt a gust of cold air on

the hands resting upon the flags; it came from under the little door to which the two walls led.

Oh, Heaven, if that door should open outward. Every nerve in the miserable fugitive's body thrilled with hope. He examined it from top to bottom, though scarcely able to distinguish its outlines in the surrounding darkness. He passed his hand over it: no bolt, no lock! a latch! He started up, the latch yielded to the pressure of his thumb: the door silently swung open before him.

"Halleluia!" murmured the rabbi in a transport of gratitude as, standing on the threshold, he beheld the scene before him.

The door had opened into the gardens, above which arched a starlit sky, into spring, liberty, life! It revealed the neighboring fields, stretching toward the sierras, whose sinuous blue lines were relieved against the horizon. Yonder lay freedom! Oh, to escape! He would journey all night through the lemon groves, whose fragrance reached him. Once in the mountains and he was safe! He inhaled the delicious air; the breeze revived him, his lungs expanded! He felt in his swelling heart the *Veni foras* of Lazurus! And to thank once more the God Who had bestowed this mercy upon

him, he extended his arms raising his eyes toward Heaven. It was an ecstasy of joy!

Then he fancied he saw the shadow of his arms approach him — fancied that he felt these shadowy arms inclose, embrace him — and that he was pressed tenderly to someone's breast. A tall figure actually did stand directly before him. He lowered his eyes — and remained motionless, gasping for breath, dazed, with fixed eyes, fairly driveling with terror.

Horror! He was in the clasp of the Grand Inquisitor himself, the venerable Pedro Arbuez d'Espila, who gazed at him with tearful eyes, like a good shepherd finding a stray lamb.

The dark-robed priest pressed the hapless Jew to his heart with so fervent an outburst of love, that the edge of the monochal haircloth rubbed Dominican's breast. And while Aser Abarnel with protruding eyes gasped in agony in the ascetic's embrace, vaguely comprehending that *all the phases of this fatal evening were only a prearranged torture, that of HOPE*, the Grand Inquisitor, with an accent of touching reproach and a look of consternation, murmured in his ear, his breath parched and burning from long fasting:

"What, my son! On the eve, perchance, of salvation — you wished to leave us?"

The Cloth Of Madness

by Seabury Quinn

This story originally appeared in YOUNG'S MAGAZINE (January 1920) and was the only Quinn story to make its first appearance in WEIRD TALES as a reprint. Seabury Quinn, of course, is most closely associated with the series of stories dealing with Dr. Jules de Grandin and Samuel Trowbridge, all 93 of which appeared in WT. One of these, *The Devil's Bride*, is book-length. The first was *The Horror on the Links*, October 1925, and the last was *The Ring of Bastet*, September 1951. Donald H. Tuck's *Handbook* lists a still earlier story as part of the series — *The Stone Image*, which appeared in the May 1, 1919 issue of THE THRILL BOOK. We asked Mr. Quinn about this, and he replied, "Dr. Trowbridge had a 'walk-on' part in *The Stone Image*, but Jules de Grandin did not make his appearance until *The Horror on the Links*. Indeed, I hadn't even thought of him at the time *The Stone Image* was written for Street & Smith's old THRILL BOOK." A selection of tales from the de Grandin series is projected for "after 1965" from Arkham House, and is titled *The Phantom Fighter*.

JAMISON ALVARDE, the noted interior decorator, was dying. His family physician

knew it; the neat, white-starched nurse — almost waspish in her impersonal devotion to her

professional duties — knew it; the eminent graduate of Hopkins and Vienna, called into consultation, whose fee would be more than the annual maintenance of a poor ward in the City Hospital, knew it; Alvarde's next of kin, a niece and nephew, hastily summoned from halfway across the continent, knew it; and — which was most important of all — Jamison Alvarde knew it.

The last rays of the December sun slanted through the casement of the sick man's room, falling directly upon the bed and illuminating his face as though with a rosy spotlight. This was fitting and proper, since he was the principal character in the short tragedy about to be acted.

It was not an ill-looking face the afternoon sun bent its brief valedictory on. Jamison Alvarde's plentiful hair was iron-gray in color, and swept up from his high, placid forehead in an even-crested pompadour. His eyebrows were heavy and intensely black, and the deep-set eyes beneath them were as gray as frosted glass. While his long illness had etched fine lines about the corners of his eyes and at the ends of his narrow lips, it had not robbed his cheeks of their rich, olive coloring, and even in the antechamber of death his mouth retained its firm, almost cruel, set.

In a far corner of the room, the family physician whispered fussily to the next of kin. Waiting for a patient to die is tiresome business, especially when one is hungry and when one expects to have roast lamb with caper sauce for dinner.

"Yes, yes!" he was saying. "Mr. Alvarde has had a great deal of trouble the last year, a very great deal of trouble. He has never been the same since that terrible affliction fell upon his wife and his friend at his country place in the Highlands. A tragedy, my dear young friends, a very great tragedy; quite enough to break anyone's health. I've no doubt that Mr. Alvarde's present illness is directly traceable to that — er — unfortunate occurrence; no doubt whatever."

Alvarde's wasted, nervous hands paused a minute in their restless fumbling at the bedclothes. His thin, straight lips twisted a moment in an inscrutable smile, and his pale lids slowly lowered till they nearly hid his roving gray eyes. With that unwonted sharpening of the senses which often comes to those weakened in body, he had heard the doctor's whispered conversation.

The mention of that June morning when his wife and friend had been discovered in their rooms, hopelessly imbecile, brought no grimace of

horror to the sick man's face. Rather, he smiled whimsically to himself, as if there were something not altogether unpleasing to him in the memory.

The afternoon sun sank behind the line of hills across the river. The great specialist got into his fur-lined overcoat and his imported motor car and drove home. The family physician left instructions to be called immediately there was any change in Mr. Alvarde's condition and went home to his lamb and capers. The next of kin tiptoed downstairs to dinner, and Jamison Alvarde was left alone with his thoughts and the white-clad nurse.

"Nurse," Alvarde raised himself slightly on one elbow, "open the lower left-hand drawer of the desk and bring me the little black book you'll find there. . . ."

"Now give me my fountain pen, please," he directed, when the sharp-featured girl had brought the book and adjusted the pillows behind his back.

The nurse withdrew to the window, watching the last spots of sunlight on the river, and Alvarde commenced to scribble on the flyleaf of the book before him. As he wrote — difficulty, for he was very weak — the same faintly reminiscent smile he had worn in the afternoon settled again on his tight-pressed lips.

Half, three-quarters, of an

hour his pen traveled laboriously over the book's blank leaf; then, with a faint sigh of satisfaction, as at a task well done, Jamison Alvarde lay back upon his pillows.

The nurse crossed the room to remove the book and pen, paused a second, looking into her patient's face, then hurried to the telephone to call the family physician.

She might have saved herself the trouble and allowed the good doctor to finish his dinner in peace. Jamison Alvarde had no need of his services, or of any other physician's. Jamison Alvarde was dead.

THE CUSTOMARY three days elapsed, and in the morning of the fourth they took Jamison Alvarde from his residence on the Drive to a new home in Shadow Lawns. It was a very stylish and dignified funeral, for Alvarde had left a respectable estate, and the high-priced funeral director who conducted the obsequies understood his business thoroughly.

On the fifth evening Alvarde's attorney — a dapper little man, much addicted to wing collars and neat, double-breasted jackets — called and read his deceased client's last will and testament to the next of kin, who, as was expected, proved also to be his residuary legatees, one-third of the es-

tate having been left the dead man's wife. Then the lawyer took up the business of straightening out Alvarde's affairs.

"It will be necessary," he informed them, stuffing the will back into his saddle-leather brief-bag, "to let me have all your uncle's papers which are in the house."

"The only papers of Uncle Jamison's we found in the house are bound in a little black book," the niece remarked. "He'd been writing in it just before he died."

When the little book was forthcoming and he had tucked it in his overcoat pocket, the lawyer seated himself in his automobile and started on his homeward trip. Before the motor had traversed two blocks he took out the slender volume and opened it. He was no waster of time; his capacity for making every minute count had won him his enviable standing at the bar.

The first words which struck his eye were written in a weak, straggling hand — the words Jamison Alvarde had penned on the night of his death.

"What the devil" the lawyer exclaimed as he slowly spelt out the sprawling characters of the inscription. "Did the old fool try to make another will on his death-bed?"

I, Jamison Alvarde, being of sound mind and memory (which is

more than some I know are), but being weakened in body, and about to die, do declare the following statement to be the true explanation of the mental derangement which occurred to my wife, Edith, and my friend, Hector Fuller, at my country place last summer.

My one regret in publishing this memoir is that I shall not be present to hear the comments of the fools who have sympathized with me in my "affliction."

JAMISON ALVARDE.

"Humph," the lawyer turned the scribbled fly-leaf over. Following the leaf upon which the scrawling introduction was scratched, the book was written in a firm, clear hand, the hand Alvarde had penned in health. The pages were filled with detached paragraphs, like diary entries, but undated. The first sheet was torn diagonally across, so that the first sentence was incomplete.

* * *

. . . somewhat cool for this time of year. Excepting the tower, the house is fully completed, and we shall live here while the carpenters are finishing up.

I have asked Hector Fuller up for the weekend. Edith protested against his coming; for, with every woman's loathing of the unattainable, she has taken his impregnable bachelorhood as a deliberate affront. But Fuller is my friend, and whether Edith is pleased

with his visit or not is of no moment to me. This is my house and Edith is my wife; and I mean to be master of both.

FULLER CAME this afternoon. I watched Edith narrowly when she greeted him, for I had determined to cut her allowance in two if she were discourteous to him. She blushed to the roots of her hair when she gave him her hand, and his face colored, too. Fuller looked uncomfortably at me out of the corner of his eye, and I caught a sidelong glance from Edith which reminded me of the look Regina, my Irish setter, gives me when she knows I am about to beat her for worrying the poultry. I was sorry for Fuller; having to be polite to a hostess who dislikes you must be uncomfortable business.

FULLER IS a sly old dog! Pretending misogynist that he is, always preaching the joys of an Eveless Eden, I've caught him red-handed in a flirtation with some silly woman — and, I believe, a married one, at that.

This afternoon I came in late from inspecting the decorations of the Grayson mansion drawing-room, and as I was about to mount the stairs I noticed a bit of folded paper lying on the floor. The sight

of this trash on my hall carpet angered me; I hate such clutter and disorder.

I was about to pitch the scrap of paper in the fireplace when I noticed that it was house stationery and was written on. I opened it and recognized Fuller's writing.

My darling:

The ordeal was terrible. How I hate to have to pretend; how you hate it; how I hate to see you obliged to do it! If only you-know-who would go away, so that we could cast aside this hideous mask, how happy we could be!

My dear, there are not words enough in all the languages combined to tell you how I love you. I'd rather kiss the print of your little foot in the dust than the lips of any other woman on earth. Oh, if only that brute could be got rid of!

Only a few more days, dear one, and the ghastly comedy we're playing will be finished. Then I will be at liberty to meet you once more at the old accustomed place.

My darling, my darling, I love you!

HECTOR.

"H'm!" I muttered, as I shoved the slushy thing into my jacket pocket. "That 'brute' they're so anxious to be rid of is undoubtedly the lady's husband. Abuse the husband to flatter the wife, every time!"

We husbands are always brutes once we're pledged, with bell, book and candle, to provide a living for some worthless female. We're precious enough before they've put their

halter on us, though, I've noticed! I dare say Edith thinks me a brute, though the devil knows it keeps my nose to the grindstone, paying for her fripperies.

I found Fuller in his room, dressing for dinner, and gave him his note.

"Next time, don't be so careless with your *billets d'amour*," I cautioned. "Someone might find it and pass it along to her husband, you know."

The shot went home. Fuller turned as pale as if a ghost had entered the room with me, and faced about with a spring, as though expecting me to attack him.

"I suppose you'll demand that I leave the house immediately?" he asked, when he saw that I had no immediate intention of assaulting him.

I laughed. "My dear boy," I told him, "it's a matter of perfect indifference to me how much you protest your hatred of the sex in public and flirt with them in private. Only you're so ungodly absent-minded with your mash notes! I found that gummy thing of yours lying in plain sight on the hall floor. Is your brain so addled with love of the fair one that you forget to post your letters to her?"

He regarded me a moment as a condemned criminal might the messenger who brings his

reprieve, and jammed the note into his waistcoat pocket.

"Thanks, old man," he gulped. "Awfully good of you to bring it to me!"

"Oh, that's all right!" I assured him as I started to my own room to dress. "Don't bother about thanking me."

Funny, what a doddering fool love can make of a sensible man like Fuller.

I WISH FULLER would use more discretion in his choice of a light o' love. She uses lily of the valley.

Lily of the valley is the one thing about which Edith has defied me. Time and again I've ordered her never to bring the pestilent stuff into my house, and every time I've found a phial of it on her dressing-table I've flung it out the window; yet her hair, her fingertips and her lingerie fairly reek with it, despite my commands.

I came out late from town this evening, and Grigsby, the butler, informed me that Fuller had dropped out during the afternoon and had put up in his usual room. I stopped in his quarters for a little chat before going to bed. He had already turned in, but was still awake. His clothes were sprawled all over the room in the careless way he always throws them when he crawls into bed, and I had no choice

but to share the same chair with his dinner jacket.

I'd scarcely gotten seated and lighted a cigar when I began to notice the unpleasant proximity of lily of the valley scent. At first I couldn't make out where the annoying odor came from, but a few sniffs localized its source. Fuller's dinner jacket was redolent with the perfume.

"No doubt you find it very comforting to have your lady love rest her head on your shoulder," I grumbled, "but, for heaven's sake, why don't you get her to use some other scent? I loathe this stuff as the devil does holy water."

He gaped at me like a goldfish viewing the sunlight through the walls of an aquarium.

"What d'ye mean, 'some other scent?'" he asked. "I don't follow you."

"Why, this infernal lily of the valley." I tapped the scented shoulder of his jacket in explanation. "I hate it more than any other smell this side of H. S. Edith uses it until I think, sometimes, I'll have to commit suicide — or murder — to get rid of it."

Fuller's eyes widened like a cat's in the twilight.

"D-does Edith — Mrs. Alvarde — use that perfume?" he stammered.

"You're devilish well right, she does, *ad nauseam*!" I growl-

ed as I got up. "And for the Lord's sake, get your woman to use something else. It's bad enough to have Edith scenting up the place, without your lugging a lot of the stuff in on your clothes."

I HAVE THOUGHT the whole matter over very carefully. I shall kill them both.

The scales fell from my eyes tonight (perhaps I would better say they were snatched from my eyes) and I see what a blind, fatuous, doting cuckold I have been for the fiend only knows how long. The shame of it is maddening.

Spring has broken early this year and summer is upon us; the roses in the lower garden are budding out, and the double row of dogwood trees which flanks the drive is festival-clad in a white surplice of blossoms.

The decorations of the Grayson house were all completed today, but I had to stay late catching up a few loose ends, so that it was well after dark when I reached home.

Fuller was out on one of the visits which have become rather frequent of late, and he and Edith had dined when I arrived. She was in the music room, strumming idly on the piano and singing softly to herself when I passed through the hall. Fuller had gone to his room for some reason or other. I could hear the sickly

sentimental refrain of the popular ballad she was thrumming as I went up the stairs:

There's a kiss that you get from
baby,
There's a kiss that you get from
Dad,
There's a kiss that you get from
Mother,
That's the first real kiss you've
had.
There's a kiss with a tender meaning,
Other kisses you recall;
But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart,
Are the sweetest kisses of all.

Something in the spring air, the shower of pearl moonbeams I'd just driven through, or the appealing lilt of the song downstairs — perhaps all three — set my pulses throbbing at an unwonted tempo; I climbed the last ten steps humming the silly words under my breath:

There's a kiss with a tender meaning,
Other kisses you recall. . . .

In his room across the hall from mine Fuller was moving about, alternately whistling and humming the same banal refrain. The words came softly through the closed door of his room:

Other kisses you recall,
But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart,
Are the sweetest kisses of all.

Strange how a snatch of song on a spring evening will carry a man's mind back to

scenes he has never thought to see reflected on his memory's screen again. As I knotted my tie I remembered my first sweetheart, pretty and blue-eyed and blonde. I used to have a trick of pulling off her glove when I brought her home from some party, and kissing all five of her pink little fingers.

Poor Elsie; when her husband died he left no insurance and God knows how many children. She came to me for help, but she had no business qualifications, couldn't even type; so there was nothing I could do for her.

Then there was another girl — a slender thing with a painted face, a robemaker's manikin. Her masculine acquaintances had been the sort who wear colored derby hats and converse in terms of the race-track and poolroom. I was the first man of breeding she had known, and she was as grateful for the common or garden variety of courtesy as a stray dog for a scrap of meat.

She knew only one medium of exchange, and her timid little offers of passion were pitiful to see.

I gave her three hundred dollars: rather a handsome settlement, considering our respective positions. A child more or less doesn't matter to her kind. . . . I've often wondered what became of her . . .

FULLER WAS STILL singing to himself when I finished dressing and went down to the dining-room. Edith had left the house and was sitting on a stone bench at the lower end of the terrace, watching the boats go by on the river below. In her white dinner frock, with the moonlight on her arms and shoulders, she was almost as pale as the marble Psyche at the other end of the walk.

A chilly breath of wind swept up from the river, rustling the dogwood blossoms and shaking the scrim curtains at the dining-room windows. Edith felt it as it passed and shivered a little.

"She'll be cold without her wrap," I speculated as I poured myself a stiff appetizer of Irish whisky and rang for Grigsby to serve dinner.

A bar from the song recurred to me:

There's a kiss with a tender meaning . . .
But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart . . .

I went into the music-room, picked up Edith's China-silk scarf, and stepped through the French window to the lawn.

Walking quietly across the short-cut grass, I approached her from the rear, softly humming the refrain.

"But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart, are the sweetest

kisses of all," I finished aloud, dropping the shawl over her narrow shoulders, putting my hands over her eyes, and bending forward to kiss her full upon the lips.

Her white, thin hands flew up from her lap and clasped about my neck, drawing my cheek close to hers.

"Oh!" she cried, and the exclamation was about a sob, "my dear, my dear, I've been thinking you'd never come! I've been so lonesome."

Then she struck me playfully on the cheek and gave a sniff of disapproval.

"Hector," she scolded, "you've been drinking that horrid Irish whisky, and you know how I hate it. *He* uses it!"

I released her eyes and sprang back, livid with fury. But my mind worked with the agility of a leaping cat. Before Edith had time to recover from the horror the discovery of her error had given her. I had landed fairly on my mental feet.

I threw back my head and laughed; laughed naturally, laughed uproariously.

"By the Lord Harry, old girl," I cried, pounding my thigh in a perfect paroxysm of counterfeit mirth, "that's the best joke I've heard you spring in years! Everyone knows you hate Hector Fuller worse than a hen hates a rainstorm, and now you call me by his name and

pretend you thought you were kissing him!" Again I rocked forward in a spasm of laughter. "And I can just about imagine how you'd have written the ten commandments on his face with your nails if it really had been Fuller!"

All the while I was watching her as a snake does a bird, noting the look of blank amazement which slowly replaced the terrified gaze she had first turned to me when she discovered her mistake.

"Let's go in the house and have some music; it's too cold for you out here, dear," I concluded, as soon as I had calmed down my mock amusement.

She rose as obediently as a well-trained dog and accompanied me across the lawn in silence. But she shuddered slightly as I put my arm about her. Women have no control of their emotions.

While I smoked three or four cigarettes, she played and sang for me, and then, pleading a headache — the old, threadbare excuse of all her sex since Eve first left the garden — begged leave to go up to bed.

I let her go and went out to the stable. I harnessed the cob to the village cart and drove furiously along the country lanes for three hours, lashing the horse fiercely whenever he dropped out of a gallop. The poor brute was nearly foundered when I turned him home;

but I was as raging wild as ever.

I have thought the whole matter over very carefully. I shall kill them both.

LAST NIGHT I said I should kill them both. Today I know I *must* kill them, or they will surely kill me. A sentence from Fuller's treacherous note to Edith has been pounding in my head all day with the monotony of a funeral dirge:

"... if that brute could only be got rid off"

When faithless wives and false friends conspire to be rid of an inconvenient husband the number of his days is appointed. The dockets of our criminal courts bear eloquent testimony of that.

A weakling would seek divorce as the easy solution of my difficulty; but I am no maudlin fool, ready to efface myself, leaving the way clear for them to flaunt their triumph and my dishonor before the world.

I must be very careful in my execution of these two. Except for them, no one must suspect my vengeance; for it is no part of my plan to die like a felon for having exacted the justice which the law denies me.

I must kill them, but I must be careful — very careful.

IF I WERE a superstitious man I should say that the Fates have decided to aid me in the furtherance of my plans. While I was lunching at the Republique today, Howard Enright dropped into the chair opposite me. I greeted him sourly enough, for I was in no mood for conversation, but he refused to be rebuffed.

He is just back from an extended tour of the East, where he has picked up enough expensive junk for his house to fill three museums and impoverish half a dozen millionaires. Despite my curt answers, he rambled on about the thousand and one *objets de vertu* he'd lugged halfway around the world, until I was ready to believe that he'd brought the whole *Arabian Nights* home with him. Othello's tales of

. . . anthropophagi,
And men whose heads do grow below
their shoulders,

were hackneyed beside the wonders Enright would display at his galleries.

He had a jade Buddha that caught and held the sunlight until the beholder was ready to swear that the image was filled with living fire. He had lachrymatories from Persia — tall, spindle-necked bottles, coming in pairs, into which the Persian widows wept, that the fullness of the bottles might

be an outward and visible sign of the fullness of their grief at their husbands' taking-off. He had a great fan from Korea, where there was an ancient custom that no widow might remarry till her husband's grave was dry. The fan, he explained, was to be used by the lady in hastening the aridness of her lord's burial mound. He had bits of porcelain from the dynasties of Han and Ming — things so fragile that the Chinese called them "frozen air," and so precious that they were worth their weight in rubies.

I was thoroughly bored by his graphic cataloguing of the stock of his junkshop, and had given up the attempt to stifle a yawn, when he wound up with:

"And I've something else, Alvarde, that will appeal to you as an interior decorator."

"Indeed?" I masked the yawn with my hand.

"Yes, sir. Weirdest thing you ever saw; regular old marrow-freezer! They call it 'the cloth of madness,' and there's a legend to the effect that whoever looks at it loses his reason. Some vengeful old raja had it woven for the special benefit of some friends he suspected of forgetting that the harem is sacred, inviolate."

"Well, did it work?" I queried, more for the sake of politeness than anything else.

"They say it did. According

to tradition he had an asylumful of crazy friends and acquaintances in less than no time. Anyhow, I couldn't get one of the natives to look at the thing. Rummy lot, these Indians."

I smiled my appreciation of the wily old maharaja's finesse. "What does it look like, this 'cloth of madness' of yours?"

"Oh," Enright spread his hands wide in preparation for an eloquent description, "It's — it's — it's — Oh, hang it all, man, I can't describe the beastly thing to you! All red and full of funny, twisty black lines like snakes and lizards and why, Alvarde, it's like an X-ray of a guilty conscience! Come around to the shop and see for yourself; I'd never be able to make you imagine the thing's damnable fascination."

"There might be an idea for some bizarre pattern in wall-hanging," I reflected. "New designs are hard to find nowadays." So I went with him to the shop.

He undid several yards of cocomatting wrappings and unfurlfurl'd a small oblong of crimson cloth for my inspection.

AT FIRST SIGHT of the thing I was ready to laugh in his face; for, save for a rather unusual combination of involuted and convoluted black lines and stripes on the cloth's red

ground, it seemed to differ in no particular from hundreds of other Oriental tapestries.

Enright must have seen the unspoken skepticism in my face, for the corners of his small hazel eyes wrinkled in amusement.

"Go ahead and laugh," he invited, "but I'll bet you ten dollars that you'll be ready to cry 'nough' by the time you've looked at it steadily for five minutes."

For answer I drew a bill from my pocket and placed it on a tabouret, without taking my eyes from the bit of weaving.

Enright matched my note with one of his, and drew back, smiling whimsically at me through the smoke of his cigar.

"Hand me your ten when the five minutes are up," I ordered, keeping my gaze fixed on the cloth.

"Easy now," he counseled, glancing at his watch; "you've only been looking forty seconds, so far."

One who has never tried it has no conception of how time drags while the eyes are focused on an immovable object. In the quiet of the storeroom I could hear the ticking of Enright's watch distinctly, and the ticks seemed a minute apart. An almost uncontrollable desire to rub my eyes, to shut them, to direct them anywhere but at the cloth, came over me. The writhing broad and nar-

row black bands on the ruby surface seemed to be slowly coming to life. They wound and twisted, one upon another, like the shadows of scores of snakes suspended in the sunlight. They seemed alternately to advance and retreat upon their glaring resting-place, and my eyes ached with the effort to follow their serpentine movements.

I began to be obsessed with the thought that there really were reptiles — dozens of them, scores of them, hundreds of them — behind me; that they would drop upon me any moment, smearing my body with their loathsome slime, tearing my flesh with their fangs, filling my blood with their deadly venom.

"Time up?" I called, my voice sounding hoarse and croaking in my own ears.

"Only two minutes more to go," Enright answered pleasantly.

"I'll — stick — it — out — if — it — kills — me!" I muttered between my teeth, and, covering my eyes with my hands, fell choking and gasping to my knees.

The infernal cloth had won. Scornful and determined as I had been, it had worn my nerves to shreds and made a whimpering, fear-crazed thing of me in three minutes.

"How much will you take for that thing, Enright?" I ask-

ed, when I had recovered my composure to some extent.

"More than you're able to give, son," he replied. "I'll get a half-grown fortune from some museum for that bit of fancy work or my name isn't Howard Enright."

"Well," I temporized, "will you rent it to me, then? I'd like to have a modified copy of it made by my paper manufacturer. Some client with a diseased mind might want a chamber of horrors done, and a denatured copy of this cloth would be just the thing."

"Promise me on your honor as a gentleman not to have a duplicate made, and I'll lend it to you for forty-eight hours for nothing," Enright offered.

"Done!" I agreed.

I took the tapestry to my papermaker this afternoon. I have ordered two rolls of paper made in exact imitation of it. I shall paper the unfinished tower room with it.

THE TRAP IS SET. Working at night, and without help, I have hung the walls and ceiling of the tower attic room with the paper. This room is small, hardly more than a large closet, and, being originally intended for a lumber room, is without windows or other communication with the outside except a small fresh-air vent in the roof.

With an idea of obtaining

the maximum amount of room for storage purposes, I had dispensed with all wood trim and had the door made flush with the wall. This renders the place ideal for my purpose, for I am able to cover every fractional inch of wall space with the paper; so that, when the door is closed, the maddening design is presented to the gaze from every direction except the floor. This I have painted white, the better to reflect the glare from the cluster of high-power nitrogen-filled electric lights I have placed in the ceiling.

Early this morning, when I had finally completed my work, I switched on the full force of light and looked about me.

From above, the glare of the electric bulbs beat down like the fires that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; from the white floor the reflection smote my eyes like splinters of incandescent metal, and from the walls and ceiling the writhing, tortuous design of the demoniacal paper glared like (to use Enright's description) "an X-ray of a guilty conscienc."

I had been careful to leave the door open when I tried my experiment. Lucky for me I did; for I had scarcely glanced once round the hideous apartment when I began to feel the same panic fear I had experienced when I first looked at the cloth in Enright's store. My eyes

seemed bulging from their sockets; my breath came hot and quick, like the breath of a sleeper bound fast in a nightmare, and I all but lost my sense of direction. It was with great effort that I found the open door and staggered through it, with the sweat of mortal terror standing on my forehead.

I have been very good to Edith these last few days. I have endeavored to anticipate her every wish; have come back from the city loaded with bonbons and flowers like a country bumpkin wooing his sweetheart; I have doubled her allowance of spending money.

Last evening, after dinner, she kissed me, of her own volition. I felt my plan for vengeance weaken a little as her arms went around my neck. . . . Fool! Her lips are soiled with another man's kisses; her arms are tainted with the embraces of her paramour.

I looked into her eyes, warm and brown and bright, and wondered how often they had shone with love of Fuller. How long, I wondered, had it been since the same arm which rested on my shoulder had clasped the neck of the man who called himself my friend — and stole my honor like a common thief?

I shall invite Fuller to the house to spend the weekend. My trap is set; now to snare the quarry.

IT IS DONE.

Last week I mentioned casually to Edith that I had asked Fuller up for the weekend. I saw her eyes brighten at the suggestion, but chose to misinterpret the sign.

"It's no use making a fuss about it," I told her. "I know you don't like him; but I want him here, so you might just as well make the best of it."

She made no reply, simply rose and left the room. As a play-actor Edith is a sad failure. I suppose she feared her joy would be too apparent, even to a doting fool husband if she remained.

When Fuller came I made a great show of urging her to be courteous to him, and greeted him cordially myself.

Fuller's was a charming personality. Quick-witted, loquacious, well read and much traveled, he was an ideal guest, providing his own and his host's entertainment. We passed a pleasant afternoon together.

I never saw Edith more charming than at dinner that night. There was a faint flush in her face, her eyes were very bright. She was wearing a gown of silver over sapphire, and had a jasmine blossom pinned in the smooth coils of her chocolate-colored hair.

The corners of my mouth flexed grimly at sight of the flower. Once, when I was in South America, I had seen a

vicious knife duel between two men, and when I asked the cause of the brawl, I was told that one had offered the other's sister a jasmine bloom. Jasmine they explained, was the symbol of inconstancy. Strange, that of all the flowers in my grounds and conservatory Edith should have chosen the badge of infidelity to wear that night!

From my seat at the head of the table I could see Fuller worshipping Edith with his eyes. There was that in his adoring gaze which gave one to think of a medieval knight kneeling humbly at his fair lady's feet, while her husband was off to the crusades.

We had coffee in the music room. Edith seemed ill at ease, fumbling with her cup, twirling the stem of her liqueur glass between her fingers, toying nervously with her cigarette. Before Fuller and I had finished, she rose abruptly and went to the piano.

There was no light burning in the room, and the moon laid a path of mother-of-pearl across the polished floor. With the silver radiance of the moonlight on the silver meshes of her gown, Edith was white as a wraith of the night. A snatch from Oscar Wilde's *Salome* flashed through my mind:

She is like a dead woman; a dead woman who covers herself with a veil and goes seeking for lovers.

I smiled to myself in the darkness. "She will seek no more after tonight," I reflected.

"Ah, moon of my delight, that
knowst no wane,
The moon of heav'n is rising once
again;
How oft hereafter rising shall she
look
Through this same garden after one
— in vain?"

she sang. I rose and began to pace the room.

Gradually, taking great pains to be impersonal about it, I swung the conversion to stories of the vengeance wreaked by outraged husbands on faithless wives and their paramours. Incidentally, I recounted the legend of the cloth of madness; how the Indian prince had demanded his treacherous friends' sanity as the price of their perdition.

Edith's hands fluttered among the sheets of music on the piano; a leaf of it fell to the floor. Fuller leaped gallantly to his feet to retrieve it for her, and their hands came together in the moonlight. I saw his fingers close round hers and give them a reassuring pressure.

"What would you do, Alvarde, if you caught another man trespassing on your wife's affections?" Fuller suddenly shot at me. "Kill him?"

Edith gave a short little choking gasp and put her hand to her throat very suddenly.

She had always been afraid of me.

"My dear man," I drawled, "do I look like such a fool?"

"Fool?"

"Precisely; 'fool' is what I said. Why should I hang for another man's sin? I rather think the old raja's method of revenge would appeal to me."

"But, you know," he objected, "the cloth of madness is only a myth."

"So is my wife's incontinence," I answered shortly. "One is quite as possible as the other."

And so we let the talk of betrayed friendship and its price drop, and passed to a discussion of interior decorations.

I told them of my more unusual bits of work for a while, then suggested:

"Let's go to the tower rooms. I've evolved a new scheme in wall-hangings for them. One of the rooms especially will interest you two."

We went through the larger rooms, I pointing out the novelties in color scheme, pattern and wood trim, they taking only a perfunctory interest in my designs.

AT THE DOOR of the store-room I stood aside to let them pass. Edith paused at the threshold, looking questioningly, fearfully, into the velvety darkness of the little chamber. Fuller stepped before her.

"Let me go first," he said; "it's dark in there."

"Yes," I echoed, all the smoldering resentment I had felt for months flaming up in my voice, "it is dark in there — we'll lighten it."

I put out my hand, pushing Edith roughly through the doorway after Fuller, slammed the door, locked it, and pressed the switch which controlled the electric lights. Then I bent listening at the keyhole.

For the space of a long breath all was silent in the little room; then there was a deep-drawn sigh, whether from Edith or Fuller I could not say.

"Well, what's next?" I heard him ask. "If this is Jamison's idea of a joke, I think he's showing mighty poor taste."

"Hector," it was Edith speaking in a still, frightened whisper, "he *knew*!"

Fuller's steps sounded harshly on the bare, polished floor of the empty room as he strode about it, seeking an exit; his fists pounded the walls in search of the hidden door. I had to stifle the laughter in my throat; for I knew how the rounded walls, the unbroken monotony of the crimson and black paper, and the glaring reflection from the white floor would confound his sense of direction. He was pacing the room like a blind, caged beast, striking the walls again and again in the same place, and

meeting with no more success than an imprisoned bumble-bee flying at the transparent walls of a poison-jar.

For several minutes he continued his futile efforts; then I heard him withdraw to the center of the room.

There was a faint rustle of skirts. She was shrinking up against him.

"She's in his arms, now," I muttered. "Let her cling to him; let him hold her. I wish them joy of each other."

Several minutes more. Then: "Hector, I'm afraid; I'm terrified. Hold me close, dear."

I bit my lips. Would that devil's design on the walls never begin to work?

"Hector," this time the words came quaveringly, as though she were fighting back a chill, "that paper on the wall — does it seem to you as if the figures on it were moving?"

"Yes, dear."

"They are like snakes — like horrible twisting snakes. I feel as though they were going to spring at me from the walls."

"A-a-h!" I murmured to myself. "They're beginning to notice now."

Fuller took several quick, decided steps from the room's center, walking directly toward the door. I drew back and seized a chair, ready to strike him down if he succeeded in breaking through the light wooden frame. I had not count-

ed on his retaining his faculties so long, and had taken no precautions to reinforce the lock, trusting the paper with which it was covered to mask the door effectively.

Within a foot or so of the door he paused irresolutely, waited a moment, and retreated.

"I can't do it!" he almost wailed. "I can't bear to put my hands against that wall!"

"Hector!" This time there was no mistaking the panic in Edith's voice; every word came with a gasp. "The paper — the paper on the wall; it — it's — the — cloth — of — madness! It's that awful tapestry he told us about tonight."

"My God, girl," his reply came thickly, as though his tongue were swollen in his mouth, "you're right!"

I COULD HEAR them breathing heavily, like spent runners after a race, or those in the presence of mortal danger.

Softly, there came the sound of Edith's sobbing. Very low it was, and very pitiful, like the disconsolate heart-broken sobbing of a little child who has lost its mother, and is afraid.

"Oh!" she whimpered, "let me hide my face against you, dear. Don't let me look at those ghastly things on the walls. You must shut your eyes, too, dear; you must not look either."

I waited patiently outside the door. Even closed eyes, I knew, could not withstand the intense glare of those lights and the fascination of those flame-colored walls.

Her resolution broke even sooner than I had expected.

"I can't bear the darkness," she wailed. "I must look, I must see them — the horrible snakes, the hideous snakes that are beckoning to me from the walls. Hold me, Hector, darling; don't let me move — don't let me go to them! Hold me fast in your arms."

Another pause. Dimly I caught another noise — one that I had not heard before. Sharp and syncopated it was, like the clicking of castanets heard from a distance. It puzzled me at first; then recognition burst upon me, and I had to thrust my tongue against my teeth to keep from laughing aloud. It was a sound I'd heard on very cold nights when I'd passed shivering newsboys filching a little heat from above some engine-room grating. It was the sound of chattering teeth.

It was warm that night; the temperature in that little, poorly ventilated room, with those great lights burning in it, must have been like the entrance to Avernus; yet their teeth were chattering like a monk's clapping.

I was striding softly across

the floor, digging my nails into my palms in an effort to keep from giving audible vent to my feeling of triumph, when my steps were arrested by a titter from the room beyond. Edith was laughing, not mirthfully, but with the shrill cachinnation of hysteria. In a moment her quavering treble was seconded by a deep, masculine baritone. The pair of them was laughing in concert, and from the crackling strain in their voices I knew that they were trying with all their strength to keep silence, yet laughed the harder as they strove.

I turned on my heel and descended to the dining-room. No need to listen further, I knew. A few hours more, at most, and my revenge would be complete. I was shivering a little, myself.

Downstairs, I poured out a stiff peg of Scotch. Raising my glass I looked out into the moonlight, apostrophizing the old raia who invented the cloth of madness.

"Here's to you, brother!" I said as I turned my glass bottom up.

Shortly after midnight I climbed the stairs to the tower and stopped before the door of the little room where I left them. I listened intently for a minute. There was no more sound from beyond the door than if it had barred the entrance to a tomb.

I pressed the electric switch, reducing the force of the lights within by half, then unlocked the door and opened it a crack, peering through the narrow opening.

INSIDE, EVERYTHING was still, still as a nursery at midnight.

Fuller was sitting upright in the middle of the floor, an inane smirk overspreading his face. His collar and tie were undone, his waistcoat was unbuttoned, his shirt-front was partly loosened from its studs, and much wrinkled. His tongue protruded from his mouth, hanging flaccidly over his lower lip, as though he had lost control of it. Altogether, he was a figure of comic tragedy, like that character of Victor Hugo's whose face had been so horribly deformed in childhood that, no matter what his emotion was, he could do nothing but grin.

Nearer the door, just as she had fallen, lay Edith. One arm was extended, the hand resting palm up on the floor, the fingers slightly curled, like a sleeping child's. Her cheek lay pillowed on her arms. Her hair was a little disarranged and the jasmine flower had fallen from it. One of her satin pumps had dropped off and lay gaping emptily beside her, exposing her narrow, silk-cased foot. I

could see the veins of her instep showing against the white flesh under her silver-tissue stocking. Her lips were parted very slightly.

The air of the place was heavy with the perfume of lily of the valley.

I gathered her in my arms, and she whimpered a little, like a child that is disturbed in its sleep, as I carried her down to her room.

It was difficult business disrobing her and getting her into bed, for she seemed to have lost all control of her muscles, even being unable to take the pins from her hair.

Fuller was a heavy man, but somehow I managed to drag him downstairs and tumble him into bed, being careful to scatter his clothes about the room as was his custom when turning in late.

Last of all I returned to the tower and worked like a fiend, obliterating every trace of the wall-paper's design with gray paint I had hidden away for that purpose. Two hours' work, and the little room was as demure in its fresh coating of Quaker drab as a nun's cell. A neat, well-lighted storeroom it was, nothing more. Every lingering sign of the cloth of madness was hidden away forever.

I slept well in the morning next day, rousing only when Grigsby came rushing into my

room and shook me roughly by the shoulder.

"Mr. Alvarde, sir," he panted, his eyes bulging from his face like a terrified frog's, "something terrible has happened, sir!"

"What's the matter?" I growled at him sleepily. "Cook gone on a strike?"

"Oh, no, sir, no!" He wrung his hands together in anguish. "It's really terrible, sir! Mr. Fuller's a-sittin' on the edge of his bed, a-tryin' to put both feet into one leg of his trousers, sir, and he's smilin' something awful." And Grigsby attempted to twist his heavy features into an imitation of Fuller's demented grin.

I got into my slippers and robe and started across the hall for Fuller's room, running full tilt into Agnes, the waitress. When Edith had failed to come down long after her usual breakfast hour, Agnes had gone upstairs to see what was detaining her, and had come running to me, fear written in every line of her face.

"Oh, sir, something's wrong with Mrs. Alvarde! I went in to call her, and she wouldn't answer me, nor look at me, nor nothing; just lies there and laughs and mumbles at herself like she was a baby!"

"You're a pair of fools," I told her and Grigsby. "You stay here; I'll go and see for myself."

It was true. Fuller was as perfect an imbecile as was ever confined in an asylum, and Edith's mental timepiece had been turned back thirty-five years. No babe in arms was ever more helpless in body and mind than she.

THE PAPERS AND the doctors and the neighbors made a great fuss about it. Everyone sympathized with my unfortunate wife and friend and wondered how I could stand my terrible misfortune with such fortitude. I closed the house and sold it at a loss several months later.

Edith is still at a sanatorium, and the physicians look sorrowfully at me when I go out to visit her, and tell me that she will never be anything but a grown-up infant, though she will probably live to a ripe old age.

Fuller's malady has taken a turn for the worse. Last month they had to restrain him with a strait-jacket. He was raving about some strange kind of cloth — what it was they couldn't make out — and threatening to kill me: me, his best and oldest friend!

"Let me go first, it's dark in

there!" Fuller said when he and Edith stood at the entrance of the storeroom. I've often wondered which one of them went into the darkness of insanity first. Edith, I imagine; women have no control of their emotions.

I AM A sick man. The physician tells me that there's nothing to worry about, but I read my death sentence in his eyes. If there's such a place as the hell the preachers tell of, I suppose I'll go there. At least, I'll have to die to do it; Edith and Fuller got theirs here, and it will last through all the long years they live like brute beasts in their madhouse cells.

* * *

JAMISON ALVARDE'S attorney closed the little black book with a snap and pursed his lips. Anyone looking at him would have said that he was about to whistle.

"Yes," he said meditatively, tapping his knee with the little book, "if there's a hell he's undoubtedly there now! It's a pity if he isn't. This scheme of things certainly seems to require a hell — a good hot one, too!"

The Tree

by Gerald W. Page

Things are not entirely what they seem in this brief tale by a new author . . .

FOR MANY YEARS the tree waited while it was growing; and as it grew it watched the small village a mile and a half away. The life stirred in its roots but the hunger remained under control. Slowly the tree's sentience gathered strength and knowledge; slowly the tree made ready for the day that would come.

Instinctively it knew enough to keep the hunger under control until its strength was gathered. It could feed on small things, birds, small animals —

even insects would do until then. But the tree did not know its own origins, nor did it associate the nearby crater with itself. Its only concern was the hunger and gathering its strength so that it might satisfy that hunger.

Years passed and at last the tree gathered sufficient strength . . .

THE BODY LAY sprawled at the base of an old oak on a rise about a half mile from town.

Sheriff Billy Wayne breathed with difficulty as he watched Doc Calder examine the corpse indifferently. Billy Wayne usually liked his job, but that was the part about riding around in a new black Ford, giving out an occasional traffic ticket, or sometimes having to jail an occasional farmer with too much Saturday night fun in him. He didn't even mind the occasional official paper he had to serve on somebody, because after all, that was the way the county was run. But the part that called for him to investigate crimes — especially violent crimes, such as murder — was something else again. Corpses always gave Billy Wayne the creeps.

And this corpse had been a ten year old kid named Charlie Showers.

Doc Calder finally got to his feet.

"Well?" the sheriff asked.

"Well, what? You know I can't say anything until there's been an autopsy."

Calder's unaffected tone and his crabbiness increased Wayne's case of the creeps. "You can tell me something, Doc. I got to have something to say to Ben Fields for that damned newspaper he runs. I got to have something to go on, Doc."

"You got to have something to go on — why? You wouldn't

know what to do with it if I could give you anything. I brought this kid into the world. Now he's dead and if you want the truth, Billy, I can't see any reason for it. I know he's in good health — or he was. But there's not a mark on him."

"Not one? How can that be?"

"Maybe a heart attack. I don't know. Read my report after the autopsy."

"He's just a kid," Billy Wayne said. "Kids don't have heart attacks."

"If you don't like my answers, don't ask questions."

THE NEXT BODY was found two weeks later in almost the same spot. This time it was a girl.

This time it was Linda Nathan, twenty years old and the prettiest girl in town. She was the daughter of Parson Elliot Nathan and to most of the town her presence in that spot, so out of the way, was very interesting in itself. But Sheriff Billy Wayne knew why she passed that way. There was a cabin up the side of the mountain where Linda often met men — different men, mostly, and once or twice she'd met Wayne there. He said nothing about that as he silently watched Calder examine the body at the scene of the death and he said nothing of that in his official report. Those of the townspeople who knew about

Linda would keep her secret for her from her family.

Doc Calder's autopsy revealed about the same as the one on Charlie Showers. In a word, the autopsy revealed nothing. Linda, like Charlie, was just dead. Calder had to call them both "heart attacks" because there was no other reasonable explanation.

Ben Fields, however, was a newspaper man. If his articles hinted at something more sinister, at least they didn't come right out and say it; but Wayne still found those newspaper articles uncomfortable.

The next death — Ike Davis, found in the same spot two days later — made it evident that something uncommon was going on, and Ben Fields brought out the first extra in the history of his paper.

THE DAY AFTER the discovery of Davis' body, Ben Fields asked, "What's your theory, Billy?"

"These ain't no common deaths, Ben."

"I know that much. What's been done to stop them?"

"I'm conducting an investigation."

"I'd sure give a lot to know what that means," Fred Purdy said. There was a scattering of nervous laughter around the room.

Billy got mad. "It means I'm investigating," he said. "A law

officer can't take the whole town into his confidence." He took a long sip of beer from his glass as a sign to anyone and everyone that the conversation on this subject was at an end. They were in Hank Fletcher's County Inn Tavern, a drab place, but the only place in town that sold beer. It was a Saturday afternoon in July, and July was as hot as she was likely to get; the place was respectably full.

Ben Fields asked, "In what way are you investigating, Sheriff?"

"I'm through talking on it, Ben. I ain't got no statement for the press."

Ben laughed. "Any way you want it, Billy. Just trying to get some news for my readers."

Billy took another sip of his beer but didn't like it. There was silence.

Fred Purdy asked, "Anybody been out to the tree lately?"

"We all been out there," said Calder.

"I was out there to see Ike," Purdy went on. "And poor Linda, before him. It's like there's something out there just waiting to pounce on somebody. That tree, maybe. It always gave me a funny feeling, that tree did. Anybody but me notice that all the grass and bushes and some other trees around that old oak is dying off. All except that oak. It's like there's

not supposed to be anything there but that oak."

"Fred, you're an idiot," said Calder.

"Ain't as educated as you are, Doc, that's for sure. But I know them people ain't dying of heart attacks unless something's giving them to them. Anybody remember the shooting star that struck out there ten years ago? You can still see the hole it made."

"Ten years ago!"

"Some things take time," Purdy said.

The door opened and Lonnie George came in. He was about sixteen, ugly and awkward; his father owned a farm over the mountain from town.

Lonnie was scared. "There's another one, Sheriff. Out by the tree — there's another one!"

The tree sensed them coming — the whole town — more people than it had ever known together at one time before. Excitement throbbed through its roots and the hunger infesting those roots. The hunger was becoming dominant, almost overpowering everything else, but there was still caution in the tree as it sensed something that implied danger.

The tree sensed fear.

The fear excited the tree like the presence of life-energy. It was a delicious sensation, deadly, thrilling. The tree had had similar sensations whenever it

had killed; the fear that was in people somehow made the hunger more acute.

The tree longed for the freedom to act as it chose: to excite the mob to fear, to strike down a victim — no, victims — and feast amidst the fear of those victims and of the others.

But the tree knew it had to be cautious to survive.

The time would come . . .

"You ever see him before?" Billy Wayne asked.

"Stranger," said Doc Calder. He was bent over the corpse, going through the pockets of his coat. "Tramp, from the old clothes and what's in his pockets." Calder paused, then stuffed the man's effects back in his coat pocket. "Least we won't have to worry about family objections to the autopsy."

"What you expect from an autopsy?" asked Fred Purdy. "Whatever killed this old man and those others just ain't where any autopsy can get at it, Doc."

"Give me a hand getting him into the meat wagon, somebody," Calder said.

Two attendants from the county hospital loaded the corpse onto a stretcher and into a waiting ambulance. Calder watched them morosely. "Now everybody go home," he said.

Some turned and took a few awkward steps toward the

road; but most didn't move at all and those who did stopped and looked back.

"I said to go home. The tramp's out of sight now."

"It ain't the tramp we got to worry about," said Purdy. "It's that old tree. I say we should get rid of it — for our own protection. Somebody got sme gasoline in his car?"

"You can't start a fire in this dry kind of weather. You . . ."

"It's clear around the tree," Fred Purdy said. "We won't start no fire that gets out of control. Even if we did, fewer people would get killed than if we did nothing."

"He's right, Doc," came a voice from the crowd. "We're most of us farmers. We burn off brush and know how to keep a fire from spreading."

Doc Calder looked disgusted and went over to the sheriff. "You stop these people, Billy Wayne. Keep them from being foolish."

"They ain't broke no laws yet. Besides, what if Fred's right?"

"You're a fool, too. Go ahead and burn your witch tree then. Maybe it'll make you feel good, like a hanging would. Just you be sheriff enough to keep them from setting these whole woods on fire."

"Don't you worry, Doc."

Someone returned from a car carrying a container of gasoline. Sheriff Billy Wayne watched as the man threw the

gasoline over the tree. And he watched as Fred Purdy took a dry twig and set fire to it with his cigarette lighter. He watched as Purdy tossed the burning twig on the gasoline-soaked tree.

HOURS LATER, the tree was a charred, shattered trunk that looked as if it had been blasted by lightning. The mob had been thorough; the fire had consumed the tree so that all that remained visible was a stump of dead, black, charcoal. Around the tree, the ground was scorched and blackened, but the fire had been kept from spreading.

But below the ground, the roots of the tree were yet living.

Awareness was slow to return to the sentience that was in the tree. The burning had been a shock, and recovery was painful. Caution now made sense; there was now a reason for those overpowering instincts toward caution. But now, the tree was weak.

It was almost dormant for a long while, as strength returned to it. Finally it felt strong enough to examine the situation.

It found that the tree was dead, destroyed. It was no more, and soon the roots would die; they would wither and shrivel and life would go out of them, and presently the

roots would cease to be even in a corpse-state. The roots of the tree were withering already

The life was losing its home.

It was the panic of that discovery that led to a greater discovery. The life began surging along the roots and then suddenly it had flowed from them. It was not a part of the tree, any more. It was just Life and it was merely in the ground. It was coherent of itself.

It did not need the tree.

All the implications presented themselves to the Life. It now had the freedom to move as it had wished, to pick its victims as it chose, to satisfy the hunger as it desired. It could feast.

The sense of caution, no longer needed, ceased to be instinctive to the Life.

The town was only a half mile away.

DUTTON'S HANDSOME BLACKWOOD

Many of you, the readers, have requested that we reprint some of the tales of Algernon Blackwood, particularly *The Wendigo* and *The Willows*. Both of these stories are included in a handsome paperback which has just been issued by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. (201 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003); the number is D166; the price is \$1.75 for a well-printed edition of 381 pages, which reached us too late for inclusion in our new book review department. (If you order by mail, we hope you'll mention you saw this notice in MOH.)

There is a very fine photograph of Blackwood and a very interesting introduction by the author, discussing this selection of stories which were written between 1906 and 1910, and which are presented here in chronological sequence. The stories are: *The Willows*, *The Woman's Ghost Story*, *Max Hensig*, *The Listener*, *The Old Man of Visions*, *May Day Eve*, *The Insanity of Jones*, *The Dance of Death*, *Miss Slumbubble*, *The Wendigo*, and *The Camp of the Dog*.

Algernon Blackwood was born in 1869 and died in 1951. Lovecraft, and other critics of weird fiction, considered his work uneven but nothing less than masterful in the best stories. While I have not read all the stories in this particular collection, I have read enough Blackwood to agree with HPL, except to add that I never found even the lesser tales less than enjoyable — and I look forward to those new to me here with confidence. RAWL

In The Court Of The Dragon

by Robert W. Chambers

"Oh Thou who burnst in heart for those who burn
In Hell, whose fires thyself shall feed in turn;
How long be crying, — 'Mercy on them, God!'
Why, who art thou to teach and He to learn?"

IN THE CHURCH of St. Barnabe vespers were over; the clergy left the altar; the little choir-boys flocked across the chancel and settled in the stalls. A Suisse in rich uniform marched down the south aisle, sounding his staff at every fourth step on the stone pavement; behind him came that eloquent preacher and good man, Monseigneur C —.

My chair was near the chancel rail. I now turned toward the west end of the church. The other people between the altar and the pulpit turned too. There

was a little scraping and rustling while the congregation seated itself again; the preacher mounted the pulpit stairs, and the organ voluntary ceased.

I had always found the organ playing at St. Barnabe highly interesting. Learned and scientific it was, too much so for my small knowledge, but expressing a vivid if cold intelligence. Moreover, it possessed the French quality of taste; taste reigned supreme, self-controlled, dignified and reticent.

Today, however, from the first chord I had felt a change for

In the November 1964 issue, we announced rather prematurely that, with our publication of *The Mask* we had reprinted all the material from Chambers' book, *The King in Yellow* which touched upon the King. Better-informed readers did not leave us in the darkness of amnesia long, stressing that we had neglected two items: *Cassilda's Song*, verse, which we had overlooked (we brought it to you in the April issue), and *In the Court of the Dragon*, which we had actually read in 1947 but forgotten since it does not appear in the 1902 edition of the book. Our thanks to DONALD A. WOLLHEIM for helping us locate this story which, we are told, leads off the original edition of the book; reader ROBERT COULSON, however, was the first one to remind us that the tale existed. For those to whom the present story will be an introduction to the "King in Yellow" cycle: the other three stories are *The Repairer of Reputations* (MOH February 1964), *The Yellow Sign* (MOH August 1963), and *The Mask* (MOH November 1964). The central device of the series is a play, the first act of which is innocuous; and somewhat banal, but which, with the second act, hypnotizes the reader into finishing it. The play tells of a frightful being known as The King in Yellow, and reading the play not only has a sort of brainwashing effect upon the reader, but in some way opens the channel between Earth and the unknown realm where The King is a real being. The King is never encountered directly, the horror being in the effects that the play and subsequent events have upon persons entrapped in its spell. This was not, perhaps, the first time in weird fiction where a fictitious book is made so vivid that readers wondered if it really existed — several readers have asked us about it — but it is the ancestor of such books in twentieth century weird fiction. Chambers did not, of course, write a play entitled *The King in Yellow*, nor did anyone else.

the worse, a sinister change. During vespers it had been chiefly the chancel organ which supported the beautiful choir, but now and again, quite wantonly as it seemed, from the west gallery where the great organ stands, a heavy hand had struck across the church, at the serene peace of those clear voices. It was something more than harsh and dissonant, and it betrayed no lack of skill. As it recurred again and again, it set me thinking of what my architect's books say about the custom in early

times to consecrate the choir as soon as it was built, and that the nave, being finished sometimes half a century later, often did not get any blessing at all: I wondered idly if that had been the case at St. Barnabé, and whether something not usually supposed to be at home in a Christian church might have entered undetected, and taken possession of the west gallery. I had read of such things happening too, but not in works on architecture.

Then I remembered that St.

Barnabe was not much more than a hundred years old, and smiled at the incongruous association of medieval superstitions with that cheerful little piece of eighteenth century rococo.

But now vespers were over, and there should have followed a few quiet chords, fit to accompany meditation, while we waited for the sermon. Instead of that, the discord at the lower end of the church broke out with the departure of the clergy, as if now nothing could control it.

I belong to those children of an older and simpler generation, who do not love to seek for psychological subtleties in art; and I have ever refused to find in music anything more than melody and harmony, but I felt that in the labyrinth of sounds now issuing from that instrument there was something being hunted. Up and down the pedals chased him, while the manuals blared approval. Poor devil! whoever he was, there seemed small hope of escape!

My nervous annoyance changed to anger. Who was doing this? How dare he play like that in the midst of divine service? I glanced at the people near me: not one appeared to be in the least disturbed. The placid brows of the kneeling nuns, still turned toward the altar, lost none of their devout abstraction, under the pale sha-

dow of their white headdress. The fashionable lady beside me was looking expectantly at Monseigneur C —. For all her face betrayed, the organ might have been singing an Ave Maria.

But now, at last, the preacher had made the sign of the cross, and commanded silence. I turned to him gladly. Thus far I had not found the rest I had counted on, when I entered St. Barnabe that afternoon.

I WAS WORN out by three nights of physical suffering and mental trouble: the last had been the worst, and it was an exhausted body, and a mind benumbed and yet acutely sensitive, which I had brought to my favorite church for healing. For I had been reading "The King in Yellow."

"The sun ariseth; they gather themselves together and lay them down in their dens." Monseigneur C —. delivered his text in a calm voice, glancing quietly over the congregation. My eyes turned, I knew not why, toward the lower end of the church. The organist was coming from behind his pipes, and passing along the gallery on his way out, I saw him disappear by a small door that leads to some stairs which descend directly to the street. He was a slender man, and his face was as white as his coat was black. "Good riddance!" I thought, "with your wicked music! I hope

your assistant will play the closing voluntary."

With a feeling of relief, with a deep, calm feeling of relief, I turned back to the mild face in the pulpit, and settled myself to listen. Here, at last, was the ease of mind I longed for.

"My children," said the preacher, "one truth the human soul finds hardest of all to learn; that it has nothing to fear. It can never be made to see that nothing can really harm it."

"Curious doctrine!" I thought, "for a Catholic priest. Let us see how he will reconcile that with the Fathers."

"Nothing can really harm the soul," he went on, in his coolest, clearest tones, "because —"

But I never heard the rest; my eye left his face, I knew not for what reason, and sought the lower end of the church. The same man was coming out from behind the organ, and was passing along the gallery *the same way*. But there had not been time for him to return, and if he had returned, I must have seen him. I felt a faint chill, and my heart sank; and yet his going and coming were no affair of mine. I looked at him: I could not look away from his black figure and his white face. When he was exactly opposite to me, he turned and sent across the church, straight into my eyes, a look of hate, intense and deadly: I had never seen any other like it; would to God I

might never see it again! Then he disappeared by the same door through which I had watched him depart less than sixty seconds before.

I sat and tried to collect my thoughts. My first sensation was like that of a very young child badly hurt, when it catches its breath before crying out.

To suddenly find myself the object of such hatred was exquisitely painful: and this man was an utter stranger. Why should he hate me so? Me, whom he had never seen before? For the moment all other sensation was merged in this one pang: even fear was subordinate to grief, and for that moment I never doubted; but in the next I began to reason, and a sense of the incongruous came to my aid.

As I have said, St. Barnabé is a modern church. It is small and well lighted; one sees all over it almost at a glance. The organ gallery gets a strong white light from a row of long windows in the clere-story, which have not even colored glass.

The pulpit being in the middle of the church, it followed that, when I was turned toward it, whatever moved at the west end could not fail to attract my eye. When the organist passed it was no wonder that I saw him: I had simply miscalculated the interval between his first and his second passing. He had come in that last time by the

other side-door. As for the look which had so upset me, there had been no such thing, and I was a nervous fool.

I looked about. This was a likely place to harbor supernatural horrors! That clear-cut, reasonable face of Monseigneur C —, his collected manner, and easy, graceful gestures, were they not just a little discouraging to the notion of a gruesome mystery? I glanced above his head, and almost laughed. That flyaway lady, supporting one corner of the pulpit canopy, which looked like a fringed damask tablecloth in a high wind, at the first attempt of a basilisk to pose up there in the organ loft, she would point her gold trumpet at him, and puff him out of existence! I laughed to myself over this conceit, which, at the time, I thought very amusing, and sat and chaffed myself and everything else, from the old harpy outside the railing, who had made me pay ten centimes for my chair, before she would let me in (she was more like a basilisk, I told myself, than was my organist with the anemic complexion): from that grim old dame, to, yes, alas! to Monseigneur C —, himself. For all devoutness had fled. I had never yet done such a thing in my life, but now I felt a desire to mock.

It was no use to sit there any longer: I must get out of doors and shake myself free from this

hateful mood. I knew the rudeness I was committing, but still I rose and left the church.

A SPRING SUN was shining on the rue St. Honore, as I ran down the church steps. On one corner stood a barrow full of yellow jonquils, pale violets from the Riviera, dark Russian violets, and white Roman hyacinths in a golden cloud of mimosa. The street was full of Sunday pleasure seekers. I swung my cane and laughed with the rest. Someone overtook and passed me. He never turned, but there was the same deadly malignity in his white profile that there had been in his eyes. I watched him as long as I could see him. His lithe back expressed the same menace; every step that carried him away from me seemed to bear him on some errand connected with my destruction.

I was creeping along, my feet almost refusing to move. There began to dawn in me a sense of responsibility for something long forgotten. It began to seem as if I deserved that which he threatened: it reached a long way back — a long, long way back. It had lain dormant all these years: it was here though, and presently it would rise and confront me. But I would try to escape; and I stumbled as best I could into the rue de Rivoli, across the Place de la Concorde and on to the Quai. I looked

with sick eyes upon the sun, shining through the white foam of the fountain, pouring over the backs of the dusty bronze river-gods, on the far-away Arc, a structure of amethyst mist, on the countless vistas of gray stems and bare branches faintly green. Then I saw him again coming down one of the chestnut alleys of the Cours la Reine.

I left the river side, plunged blindly across to the Champs Elysees and turned toward the Arc. The setting sun was sending its rays along the green sward of the Rond-point: in the full glow he sat on a bench, children and young mothers all about him. He was nothing but a Sunday loungeur, like the others, like myself. I said the words almost aloud, and all the while I gazed on the malignant hatred of his face. But he was not looking at me. I crept past and dragged my leaden feet up the Avenue. I knew that every time I met him brought him nearer to the accomplishment of his purpose and my fate. And still I tried to save myself.

The last rays of sunset were pouring through the great Arc. I passed under it, and met him face to face. I had left him far down the Champs Elysees, and yet he came in with a stream of people who were returning from the Bois de Boulogne. He came so close that he brushed me. His slender frame felt like iron inside its loose black cov-

ering. He showed no signs of haste, nor of fatigue, nor of any human feeling. His whole being expressed but one thing: the will, and the power to work me evil.

In anguish I watched him, where he went down the broad crowded Avenue, that was all flashing with wheels and the trappings of horses, and the helmets of the Garde Republicaine.

He was soon lost to sight; then I turned and fled. Into the Bois, and far out beyond it — I know not where I went, but after a long while as it seemed to me, night had fallen, and I found myself sitting at a table before a small cafe. I had wandered back into the Bois. It was hours now since I had seen him. Physical fatigue, and mental suffering had left me no more power to think or feel. I was tired, so tired! I longed to hide away in my own den. I resolved to go home. But that was a long way off.

I LIVE IN the Court of the Dragon, a narrow passage that leads from the rue de Rennes to the rue du Dragon.

It is an "Impasse"; traversable only for foot passengers. Over the entrance on the rue de Rennes is a balcony, supported by an iron dragon. Within the court tall old houses rise on either side, and close the ends that give on the two streets. Huge gates, swung back during

the day into the walls of the deep archways, close this court, after midnight, and one must enter then by ringing at a certain small doors on the side. The sunken pavement collects unsavory pools. Steep stairways pitch down to doors that open on the court. The ground floors are occupied by shops of secondhand dealers, and by iron workers. All day long the place rings with the clink of hammers, and the clang of metal bars.

Unsavory as it is below, there is cheerfulness, and comfort, and hard, honest work above.

Five flights up are the ateliers of architects and painters, and the hiding-places of middle-aged students like myself who want to live alone. When I first came here to live I was young, and not alone.

I had to walk awhile before any conveyance appeared, but at last, when I had almost reached the Arc de Triomphe again, an empty cab came along and I took it.

From the Arc to the rue de Rennes is a drive of more than half an hour, especially when one is conveyed by a tired cab horse that has been at the mercy of Sunday fete makers.

There had been time before I passed under the Dragon's wings, to meet my enemy over and over again, but I never saw him once, and now refuge was close at hand.

Before the wide gateway a

small mob of children were playing. Our concierge and his wife walked about among them with their black poodle, keeping order; some couples were waltzing on the sidewalk. I returned their greetings and hurried in.

All the inhabitants of the court had trooped out into the street. The place was quite deserted, lighted by a few lanterns hung high up, in which the gas burned dimly.

My apartment was at the top of a house, half way down the court, reached by a staircase that descended almost into the street, with only a bit of passageway intervening. I set my foot on the threshold of the open door, the friendly, old ruinous stairs rose before me, leading up to rest and shelter. Looking back over my right shoulder, I saw *him*, ten paces off. He must have entered the court with me.

He was coming straight on, neither slowly, nor swiftly, but straight on to me. And now he was looking at me. For the first time since our eyes encountered across the church they met now again, and I knew that the time had come.

Retreating backward, down the court, I faced him. I meant to escape by the entrance on the rue du Dragon. His eyes told me that I never should escape.

It seemed ages while we were going, I retreating, he advanc-

ing, down the court in perfect silence; but at last I felt the shadow of the archway, and the next step brought me within it. I had meant to turn here and spring through into the street. But the shadow was not that of an archway; it was that of a vault. The great doors on the rue du Dragon were closed. I felt this by the blackness which surrounded me, and at the same instant I read it in his face. How his face gleamed in the darkness, drawing swiftly nearer! The deep vaults, the huge closed doors their cold iron clamps were all on his side. The thing which he had threatened had arrived: it gathered and bore down on me from the fathomless shadows; the point from which it would strike was his infernal eyes. Hopeless I set my back against the barred doors and defied him.

THERE WAS A scraping of stairs on the stone floor, and a rustling as the congregation rose. I could hear the Suisse's staff in the south aisle, preceding Monseigneur C — to the sacristy.

The kneeling nuns, roused from their devout abstraction, made their reverence and went away. The fashionable lady, my neighbor, rose also, with graceful reserve. As she departed, her glance just flitted over my face in disapproval.

Half dead, or so it seemed to

me, yet intensely alive to every trifle, I sat among the leisurely moving crowd, then rose too and went toward the door.

I had slept through the sermon. Had I slept the sermon? I looked up and saw him passing along the gallery to his place. Only his side I saw; the thin bent arm in its black covering looked like one of those devilish, nameless instruments which lie in the disused torture chambers of mediæval castles.

But I had escaped him, though his eyes had said I should not. *Had* I escaped him? That which gave him the power over me came back out of oblivion, where I had hoped to keep it. For I knew him now. Death and the awful abode of lost souls, whither my weakness long ago had sent him — they had changed him for every other eye, but not for mine. I had recognized him almost from the first; I had never doubted what he was come to do; and now I knew that while my body sat safe in the cheerful little church, he had been hunting my soul in the Court of the Dragon.

I crept to the door; the organ broke out overhead with a blare. A dazzling light filled the church, blotting the altar from my eyes. The people faded away, the arches, the vaulted roof vanished. I raised my seared eyes to the fathomless glare, and I saw the black stars hanging in the heavens: and the

wet winds from the Lake of Hali chilled my face.

And now, far away, over leagues of tossing cloud-waves, I saw the moon dripping with spray; and beyond, the towers of Carcosa rose behind the moon.

Death and the awful abode of lost souls, whither my weakness long ago had sent him, had

changed him for every other eye but mine. And now I heard *his voice*, rising, swelling, thundering through the flaring light, and as I fell, the radiance increasing, increasing, poured over me in waves of flame. Then I sank into the depths, and I heard the King in Yellow whispering to my soul: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

THE RECKONING

To qualify as "most controversial", a story will have received a considerable percentage of extreme votes on both ends of the scale, and with about an equal number of each. The item in our April issue which most certainly falls into this category was *The Hand of Glory*, by R. H. D. Barham. Those of you who hated it felt that it was attempted humor which didn't come off. Many of you who did not rate it fifth place or higher said that you enjoyed it heartily, but thought other material was more deserving. And, naturally, a few of you thought it came out high by default. This is encouraging, but before we consider running more of same (which would not be soon in any event) we shall want to poll you. It might be that one such verse was fine, but that another would tend to spoil the effect.

For three issues in a row, the winning story has been in the lead from the very first ballot received, and never fallen back. There was a fierce struggle around the second and third place stories, which changed positions frequently, and also between the fourth and fifth place stories. Here is how you finally placed them:

(1) *The Dead Who Walk*, by Ray Cummings; (2) *Jack*, by Reynold Junker; (3) *The Black Laugh*, by William J. Makin; (4) *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*. by Washington Irving; (5) *The Garrison*. by David Grinnell.

Placide's Wife

by Kirk Mashburn

While Kirk Mashburn did not have very many stories in **WEIRD TALES** — his first, *The Sword of Jean Lafitte*, ran in the December 1927 issue under the by-line of W. K. Mashburn, Jr., and still later the initials, were dropped — readers remembered him best for the present tale and its sequel.

FROM THE depths of the dank, moss-festooned woods, a long-drawn howl quavered upward to a cloaked and sullen moon. There was a sinister, unearthly quality about the ululation that set it apart from the orthodox lament of any random, mournful hound.

It startled us, gathered there in the temporary shack that served the road-building crew for office and commissary combined. The dull buzz of conversation stilled for a long min-

ute. I saw more than one stolid Cajun farmer — road-builder, *pro tem* — furtively sign the cross; chairs and packing-boxes croaked under the sudden uneasy shifting of their burdens.

"Placide's wife . . ." I heard some one's perturbed mutter.

It was old Landry, gnarled and seamed and squat of body, ordinarily taciturn to the point of sourness. A half-dozen pairs of eyes flashed distrustfully in my direction, then settled in common focus upon the speak-

er. The rebuke and its intimation were plain: I was a State Highway Department engineer in 1931, an alien in their midst; and whatever old Landry had meant, it was one of those many things, ranging from the utterly trivial to the supremely tragic, of which no discussion is had with strangers. If one be a French-descended "Cajun" of the southwestern Louisiana parishes, suspicious of all unproved folk, one does not speak haphazardly concerning obscure local matters.

Landry withdrew even more deeply into his shell of taciturnity; there was an ineffectual attempt or two to resume talk, but a damper seemed to have been put upon any further desire for conversation. In twos and threes, but never singly, the members of the group drifted away to their bunks in close succession. I was left alone with Delacroix, the young commissary clerk and timekeeper for the road gang.

"What was there about what the old man said, to sour the balance of them so thoroughly?"

My companion hesitated about replying. He was of the locality, and even though of a finer breed than the teamsters and laborers of the crew, he possessed, in less degree, some of their instinctive clannishness. Still, when one is working one's way through engineering school of the State University, there is

evidence therein of qualities superior to the inhibitions of simplicity. Delacroix shrugged. "There is a story behind it," he admitted.

"Tell it," I urged. It was still too early for bed.

Once more, before he could comply, that weird latration from the forest set the night a-quiver. We listened in silence until it ended.

"So!" observed Delacroix.

Then he told me of one, Placide, and of Placide's wife; and this is the substance of his story.

PLACIDE DUBOIN [said Delacroix] spent thirty of his nearly fifty years of life peacefully upon one patch of bayou land. His paunch was kept satisfactorily heavy with beans, and with rice which he grew more by the kindness of heaven than any great exertion of his own. Sometimes he wheezed down the bayou in an ancient oyster-boat, with the running of which the indulgence of Providence may also have had a hand, judging by the neglected condition of its decrepit engine.

In the bay, Placide caught shrimps; in the winter, he sporadically trapped muskrats and shot ducks. Always, he had enough black perique for his pipe, and a little wine to wash down his food. Rarely, he would go to town and get very

drunk. For a man with no wants beyond his creature comforts, and a masterless, indolent existence, it was a good life.

Then the time came when oil was found in the neighborhood of Placide's quarter-section, and he sold the ground that he had homesteaded thirty years before, for more money than Placide had any business with. Some people said he got ten thousand dollars; the highest estimate placed the amount at five times as much. At any rate, it was enough to be Placide's undoing.

He moved to town. Now, Labranch is a village to you or even to me, a sleepy little town of some three thousand souls; but to this old one, it was a veritable city. Not that it made any difference: Placide could loaf as well as, or even better, in the town than on the bayou, and he held on to his money with tight fingers.

Placide loafed too well! Not content with a full belly and freedom, with no more burden upon his shoulders than holding fast to the wealth with which accident had endowed him, he had so much time on his hands that he filled it in by marrying a woman out of a visiting carnival troupe. Having lived womanless for nearly fifty years, this stupid one, this great clod, must marry a gypsy-looking wench from a street

fair. A snake-charmer! Eh!

True, she was young, and more than good to look at (so they say), with her olive skin and black hair, and dark, inviting eyes that turned upward a little at the corners. Nita, her name was; and though the women of Labranch snubbed her for the memory of her snakes, and for marrying old lazy Placide for his money — it *had* to be his money! — the men were friendly enough, behind their women's backs. Too friendly!

Placide, seeing his wife's flirtations, stolidly packed her off to another shack on another bayou where oil had not as yet been found, and where there were fewer men for her to dally with, beating her methodically when she rebelled. He had a certain respect for his own rights, Placide.

So Nita ate red beans and rice, and was lucky to have a pair of shoes. . . . You have heard it said, that the way to keep a woman virtuous is to keep her barefooted? Well! And all the time, Placide's money rotted wherever it was buried in the ground. No banks for that one!

And Nita, having sold herself to Placide and been cheated of her purchase price, soured inside herself, hating Placide more with each dull day. Her only companion was a great black cat that had come with

her to Labranch, along with the snakes; only, one supposes that Placide had objected to the snakes, if they did not belong to the carnival, anyway.

This cat of Nita's had yellow eyes, out of which it glared hate at all the world except its mistress. The cat hated Placide more even than Nita did: it would stare at him for minutes on end, its eyes smoldering; or, sometimes, it would arch its back and yowl at him like a fiend.

The cat would spit, also, at Henry Lebaudy and the few others who sometimes hunted or fished with Placide. It scratched Lebaudy, for no reason whatever, so Lebaudy, not liking this — and not liking cats at all, and this one even less — gabbled at Placide to kill the *sale bete noir*.

Placide — he likes the idea, him! So he shoots the cat. That is Lebaudy swears to this day that he did — shot it at least a dozen times, loading and reloading his shotgun. Placide was a crack shot, you comprehend, and grew angrier and more determined with each belch of his gun. He did not like to miss, especially this cat.

Finally, Placide begins to be afraid he is *not missing* — although the buckshot does not kill the beast, nor even seem to hurt it. Placide is very superstitious. Probably his hand trembles, and he tells Lebaudy,

"Sale bete noir, yeh! — du diable!" Dirty black beast, yes — of the Devil!

They look at each other — one pictures them. They look back at the cat. But the cat is gone, disappeared. Afterward, Lebaudy admits, they let it alone, and signed the cross whenever it came near — which, Henry says, the cat did not like, and would go howling and spitting away. Well!

So only Nita loved the cat, and the cat loved Nita: both hated Placide. As for him, this dumb Placide, he grew more sullen and suspicious than ever, without knowing exactly why, but went about his dull affairs as usual.

Sometimes he still rattled down to the bay to catch shrimps. That meant a day and part of the night away from home, even if the engine in his boat gave no trouble — which was not always, nor even often. On one such day, a vagabond gypsy peddler drove his wagon along the bayou, and stopped eventually at Placide's house.

This peddler was a bright-eyed ruffian, with dark hair falling over his forehead; not unhandsome, in a sly, evil way. Pierre Abadie, who passed Placide's shanty twice during the day, and stopped once to ask for matches to light his pipe, said that Nita and the peddler spoke together in a strange,

outlandish tongue, neither French nor English. The peddler's horse was unharnessed, and grazed about the place all through that day. Placide heard of it, and he beat Nita. Naturally!

THE PEDDLER set up a tent, outside Labranch, and mended pots and pans, and without doubt engaged in other less open practices. He seemed unconcerned, once, when Placide came by and stopped a moment in front of the tent saying nothing, but glowering sullenly. So, after a bit, Placide went on to the shack where yellow Marie sold vile bootleg whisky, and hatched viler schemes in her festering old brain.

This Marie — if she had any other name, none knew, nor cared — was a quadroon woman who had lived in a tumble-down hovel on the fringe of town for as long as most people remembered. Some of the oldest *habitants* said she had once been a wildly beautiful creature, much as a sleek, cruel, yellow tigress is beautiful; but now she was a wrinkled old hag, a dispenser of vicious liquor, a procuress when chance offered — and, so the blacks and the ignorant whites whispered, a witch. The people of Labranch would have liked to have packed her off elsewhere, but there she was.

Eh? Oh! The sheriff, among others, was one of those old men who had memories of Marie's golden days. . . . You comprehend! Then, too, this Marie was clever, discreet, you understand. Nobody knew anything against her except rumors — nobody, that is, who cared to tell. So Marie stayed on.

The old hag had no love for Placide, and he had less for her. But the one had liquor that was as cheap as it was powerful, and the other had a thirst which a perpetual regard for economy required him to quench with as little expense as might be.

Now, Placide ordinarily drank almost not at all, except reasonably of wine with his supper; but on this day, he had quarreled again with Nita, and beat her without afterward feeling the proper satisfaction. He felt that even when he knocked her half senseless, she was still the stronger of the two. His sullen spirits needed further outlet.

You have noticed, have you not, how a very little thing can set in train a whole series of events? Well! A little thing it was that Placide, the tight-fisted, should unreasonably insist upon old Marie taking drink for drink with him of her corrosive whisky. Even though Placide paid for it, it was almost as unreasonable for Marie to accept knowing as she did

the truth about what she dispensed. That is what greed for money will do: I have many times remarked that it is not a good thing.

So Placide and Marie drank together; and, after a while, Placide's sullen tongue loosened enough to where he growled of his wife to the yellow woman. That was not a good thing, either . . . But, then, what to expect, it being that Placide?

Marie, being a she-devil sober, and a more malicious she-devil in liquor, twitted him about the peddler and his suspicions of Nita, even in the hearing of the other customers who sought her aid in poisoning themselves.

"Why she doan' leave yo', dat's all Ah doan' onnerstan'," gibed the hag, in Cajun-English ilke Placide's own.

"Ahol" says Placide, speaking in the reasonably pure French of his fathers, "she hopes to find the money I have buried in the ground — and she's not going to find it, I can tell you that!"

Marie was all ears, now, and her eyes glittered like a spider's watching a fly. Money in the ground! She attempted to draw more from Placide, but her eagerness betrayed itself, and he shut up like one of those oysters, suspicious.

He had right to his suspicions for he caught her, the very next day, prowling around the

woods near his cabin on the bayou. She was peering carefully at the ground, scratching and probing here and there with a pole she carried. Now, Placide had been dully angry because he thought the peddler wanted his woman, but this Marie was after his money — and that was something else, altogether! The peddler got glares and sullen maledictions, but Marie got the beating of her life. Almost, Placide killed her; and she was just able, after a long time, to drag herself back toward town as far as the peddler's tent.

The peddler helped her as well as he could, while the hag cursed Placide and all his works. After a while she quieted, and talked long and earnestly with the gypsy, who listened more attentively as her talk went on.

Doubtless, Marie knew, as do all those who have a hand in such matters, that curses and spells and *gris-gris* charms work much better when the victim knows about it. (Maybe they would not work at all, otherwise!) She knew that Placide was very superstitious. So she was careful that it came to Placide's ears that she was going to put a *conjur* on him, and that it would be better for him to dig up his money and leave the parish. Nita, of course, would tell the peddler, in case her man took the warning to

heart. She would know when Placide dug up his money . . . After which, you speculate on the ending for yourself.

A queer thing is that Marie must have believed in her own *gris-gris* charms, especially as the peddler doubled it with a dreadful spell of his own. Doubtless they both believed in it, and it may be that they were right. Eh! Only, it may also be that they meddled with much more dangerous things than they knew; Marie especially. What the peddler thought or knew, only he could have told. At any rate, they did more than threaten Placide with a spell. They went about it, seriously.

Now, much of this story has to be surmised, and the gaps filled in between the fragments of known fact, which are fewer than they might be. But these people around here tell the whole story, when they tell it at all, with the sureness that comes of believing what one wishes to believe . . . Very well! That is the way I am telling it to you.

One thing is known: This peddler bought a crucifix at Jules Froissard's store in La-branch, which was afterward seen in Placide's cabin. Froissard remembered it by its general shape and design, and particularly because there was a little of the end broken off one arm of the cross. The peddler

got it cheaply for that reason. The crucifix later seen in Placide's shanty had this same shortened arm, but it had been painted black and changed in other ways. For one thing, a file had been used to change the Savior's face beyond recognition, and — good old Father Soulin wept bitterly when they showed him the blasphemy of it — a pair of tiny horns had been soldered to the head. The gypsy tinner's work that! (Well, he paid for it!)

There was a little red bag tied around the cross — that was Marie. Eh? Yes, certainly; it was full of queer charms to make a spell on Placide. *Gris-gris*.

Well, the peddler carried it to Placide's woman, and one supposes that they plotted much together. One believe that the peddler wanted Nita as much as he wanted Placide's money; and it may be that Nita desired the peddler, *then* . . . Afterward . . .

THE WOMEN put the impious crucifix under the bed — and that is where she made a mistake. Placide had heard of the plot to put a spell upon him, only that day, and he was both angry and afraid. He had gone to Marie's place, but he found her absent, and the door closed — which may have been well for Marie. At the peddler's tent. Placide found the gypsy

sitting crosslegged on the ground, elaborately whetting an edge upon a most ferocious-looking butcher knife. So Placide, not unreasonably, left the peddler at peace until he went back and got his gun, or at least, until he could deal with him on even terms. In the meantime, he doubtless argued that he could go home and beat Nita.

On the way back to his cabin, Placide drank from a flask he carried. Meeting with Henry Lebaudy, he would have given Henry a drink, but the bottle was empty. So Henry must come to Placide's cabin, where there was a whole demi-john of good wine, waiting to be drunk. It was not far off, and they would get drunk together.

At the cabin, Placide reached under the bed for the demi-john, felt something else, and — brought out that crucifix!

Now, Placide was superstitious: not religious, you will comprehend, but superstitious. The mutilated crucifix was so awful and startling thing to him; but whether he would have understood that it was evilly designed toward himself, without that little red bag tied to it, I do not know. The *gris-gris* he understood quite well. He went mad.

Lebaudy says he seized Nita as one might take a ten-pound sack of flour, and flung her

hard to the floor. He was a bull for strength, Placide.

Then, while she lay stunned on the floor, Placide flung the desecrated crucifix full at her smooth throat. The cross was flat and thin, and its ends were flattened and beat into a design something like a wedge-shaped cloverleaf. With Placide's great strength behind it, it is no wonder that it tore deep into Nita's round throat, where it stood upright. It wobbled drunkenly, sickening Lebaudy, while Nita quivered and twitched for a few moments; then she was still. The blood welled slowly from the wound, impeded by the instrument that caused it.

Then that great black cat bounded out of a corner, leaping over the body of its mistress as if to attack Placide. The beast thought better of it, perhaps; at any rate it turned back to sit upon the woman's breast. Lebaudy says it sat there and howled like one of those fiends in hell, while its yellow eyes blazed red fire. Heu!

Then the monster crept upward to Nita's throat. It licked away the dark blood; after which it started yowling with more energy.

All this, you understand, in just a very few minutes; while that stupid Lebaudy stood there, one assumes, with his

slack mouth hanging open wider even than usual.

Both men looked long at the body of the woman: that was all — just looked. Then Lebaudy began to look at Placide, too. Sideways, you know, like that. Placide, he began to worry . . . Well! It was time for him to worry, one comprehends!

"Now what you going to do, eh, Placide?" Lebaudy wants to know.

"Well," says Placide, speaking French like Lebaudy, and slow and heavy like he always talks, "I'm going to put her in the ground and bury her." Then he turns round and looks hard at Lebaudy, who said, afterward, that there was a red light in Placide's eyes.

"You're going to help me bury her — *and you're going to keep quiet, all the rest of your life!* Ain't you, Henry?"

"Heh?" gulps Lebaudy.

"Heh?" Placide says, too; but he says it a different way, and the veins kind of swelled in his forehead. He moved a step closer to Lebaudy.

"Yeh!" agrees this Henry, swallowing hard; "I'm going to help you bury her." (Henry Lebaudy is a little man, and he knows it!)

"*And — you're — going — to — keep — quiet!*" grits Placide. Another step closer!

"I'm going to keep quieter than that!" Lebaudy is trying

to swallow his tongue by this time, one supposes.

So Placide got spades, and they carried his woman out into the bushes a way, off behind the shack, and dug a deep hole. The cat went along, too, and spit and howled, and tried to claw Placide's legs. It hopped back and forth across the hole, after they put Nita in it and were ready to shovel the dirt on top of her.

Try as he would and did, Placide couldn't kill it with his spade . . . What? Why, because he couldn't hit it, certainly. It dodged, you understand. Lebaudy says it *faded* from under the tool — and then there it was again, quick as a flash, just out of reach. (Of course, Lebaudy is stupid; likewise, he does not always tell the truth! No, not even now that he is an old, old man, who should be thinking seriously of his sins. . . . However, I am telling you what he said, and his salvation is the priest's business — not mine!)

WELL, THEY buried Nita, and left the cat sitting on her grave. Afterward, Placide sent Lebaudy on his way, first giving him two great cupsful of strong wine, and growling a few plain threats in his ear — both of which were to stiffen Henry's resolution. So Lebaudy went.

Placide, you see, was not

really a murderer; only a poor oaf to whom the good God sent too much money, and the Devil a woman. If he had been a murderer, he would have tried to cover up his crime by killing Lebaudy, too: even this stupid Placide must have known that one hangs but once, regardless of how many times one kills. Probably he thought Lebaudy would keep quiet for a little while, at least, and give him time to get his money and escape.

But Lebaudy did not keep quiet — not very long. He didn't know how! And he was, also, afraid.

So Lebaudy went straight to the sheriff; and the sheriff, being an old man, sent his deputy, Sostan LeBleu — no, not the one you know; this was a cousin — who talked only less than Lebaudy. And thus LeBleu told others, and several volunteered to go to Placide's place with him; and one or two saddled their horses and came along without even volunteering.

They passed by the peddler's on the way, and paused long enough to wake him and tell him where they were going, and why. The peddler climbed on his old nag without bothering to saddle it, and came with them.

Now, it is some miles from Labranch to Placide's old cabin, but it is not a long ride for men on horseback. LeBleu and

his posse were soon there, demanding entrance.

There was a light inside the cabin, when LeBleu hammered on the door. After a moment, the door opened. LeBleu had his pistol in his hand, and it was a good thing it didn't have a hair trigger, because the deputy was so surprised when that door opened, he dropped the gun.

It wasn't Placide who opened — it was Nital

"Wal," she says (Nita couldn't speak French), "w'at yo want?"

LeBleu, having come to arrest her murderer, now didn't really know what he wanted, any more than she did!

"Ain't Placide killed yo'?" he blurts out. Somebody laughed (which, you can understand, almost any one *would!*), and LeBleu says, embarrassed, "I mean, where is Placide?"

"Inside," Nita tells him. "Come on in."

Placide was lying in the bed. He looked dully at LeBleu and the others, who noticed, without thinking too much about it, that there were several nasty marks on his face . . . like the claw marks of a beast, for instance . . . or a woman . . .

There was a bandage around Nita's throat, also. That much, at least, of Lebaudy's story was true — Placide had hurled something at her throat. Well, they would doubtless be think-

ing, after Nita got up, she scratched his face: nothing strange about that! A man and his wife could fight if they wanted to, could they not? Naturally!

"Too much wine: 'e's dronk!" Nita snarls. "E got dronk wit' t'at Lebaudy, an' beat me." She shrugs her shoulders, which was to say: "What is there of newness in *that*?"

"Oho!" LeBleu says, as if comprehending much. "So Lebaudy was drunk! I s'pose the walk to town sobered him up some, otherwise I'd have seen it for myself."

"I was not drunk," Lebaudy indignantly protests. "Placide gave me only two cups of wine before I left — two cups, no more!" He points to a big cup, which will hold about a pint.

Everybody shouts and laughs. Lebaudy is one of those unfortunates who can not take one drink without it affecting his already dizzy brain. So much is known to all.

Somebody notices the paleness of Placide. A pale souse. He must be very drunk, and be in the habit of drinking, very heavily, in secret. Every one had thought differently. Ah, well!

So they decided to go back to town. You will see that there was little else they could do; and, besides, there was something about Nita that made them all uncomfortable. And

uneasy. She seemed changed, in a way none of them could put a finger to; there were smoldering flames deep down in her slanting eyes, and there was something repulsive about the way she would run her red, thin tongue over her red, red lips, whenever she looked at them. More than one man caught himself making the sign of the cross, without at all knowing why . . . Well, they say one can smell the Devil a long way off. Sol

As they were going, some one saw Nita glide up to the peddler and make a swift motion with her fingers, while it seemed she hissed a few words in a tongue strange to all the rest of them. There was only one word that could be understood and remembered — no, I do not know what it was — but they say that it was afterward said by another gypsy who was asked, to mean *gold*, or *money* . . . Later, too, one of those who saw, or heard of it, was inspired to show old yellow Marie, as well as he could remember, the sign he thought Nita made. And Marie, she laughed evilly. Being very drunk and in high humor, she finally gave a sly hint that it *might* mean something like *poison*, in a certain dark and secret sign language. (Have I told you it was said, by some, that Marie engaged in darker

practices than the keeping of her dive?)

Afterward, Marie told Lebaudy that Nita probably was only fooling the peddler, so as not to frighten him. Placide, added this Marie, did not die of poisoning. More than that, she would not say a word.

One guess is as good as another; but they say there was a greedy look in the peddler's eyes as he listened to Nita. Perhaps there was a greedy look, likewise, in Nita's eyes . . . But not for gold, one thinks . . .

WHATEVER it was that Nita said to the peddler, he went with LeBleu and the others when they rode back to town. For three or four days afterward, this peddler was busy mending his horse's harness and greasing his wagon; and he offered his stock of tinware at such cheap prices that he soon disposed of it. Getting ready to move on, he said. The third or fourth night, the gypsy disappeared.

Nobody was sorry to see him go, nor felt slighted that he left without saying good-bye. Then, a trapper stopped at Placide's cabin and discovered that it was deserted except for Placide himself, who was dead and therefore could hardly be said to count. He had been dead for some days and, it being warm as to weather, he

was beginning to be unpleasant about it.

There was a curious wound, or maybe several wounds, in Placide's throat: part of him looked to have been eaten by a beast! Well, they buried him quickly.

I do not know what the coroner said about it, but other people lifted their eyebrows or shrugged, saying, "Placide died, or maybe his woman killed him; and the woman has run away with the peddler — after getting Placide's money! Ah, well, we are rid of the three of them: the peddler, Placide, and Placide's wife . . . None of them amounted to much!"

Oddly enough, the peddler's horse was soon afterward found, dead and partly devoured, in a spot deep in the woods. Eh! People wondered at that, naturally . . .

Then, one afternoon about a month after Lebaudy swore he saw Placide murder Nita, this same Lebaudy was back in the woods behind Placide's cabin, when he came upon a mound of freshly turned dirt that excited his curiosity.

The longer Lebaudy regarded the mound, the more excited he became. This looked suspiciously like a grave — and no human grave had the least right to be in that spot — that much he knew.

Now, it *was* a grave! When Lebaudy, with the aid of a

shovel which he ran and fetched from Placide's old cabin, finally overcame his indecision and dug into the mound, he found a man's body! And whose do you suppose it was? *The peddler's!*

What? Indeed not! That is the curious part of it: this peddler's body was not at all decomposed! And there was the same sort of wound, or wounds, in his throat that Placide had — and they were half healed!

Lebaudy, one can imagine, was knocking about the knees. It was getting dusk, and that made things worse. He had reason enough to know that this body did not look as it ought to look, having been dead and covered with dirt. Whether it had been buried one day or ten, it looked too *fresh*. It surely wasn't breathing, it was dead, and yet — it looked as if there might be warm blood beneath its skin! And then —

Lebaudy leaned upon the wooden handle of the spade he had used, and which must have been cracked, already, for it snapped beneath his weight. He was thrown off balance, and, clutching the long handle of the spade tighter than ever, stumbled forward on the dry clods he had dug from the grave, and which rolled under his feet: he fell forward, you understand, with the spade handle thrust before him. And

the sharp, broken end of the handle, with Lebaudy's weight behind it, pierced the breast of the corpse at his feet!

(Now, you will remember, this is Lebaudy's tale: I am only telling it for *him!* So!)

Well, this broken end of the spade handle, which was really a hardwood pole, was sharp and keen, and it penetrated the corpse about where its heart should be. And the corpse moved! The dead lips screamed!

Then, the eyes opened wide (Lebaudy swears to this, although if *you* ask him, he will deny it), with such hate in them that it was like a look into the mouth of hell. But the fury swiftly faded into a look of great *gladness*, like the eyes of a bird suddenly set free of a cage; the working features softened into a mask of peace and contentment; the eyes closed. While Lebaudy watched — the body began to mortify!

Lebaudy ran, to get out of that forest, where it was getting darker with each second — ran, too, to get away from that horror he had come upon. While he ran, it seemed that there was a patter of swift feet not far behind. Fear lent wings to his feet, until he came to the banks of the bayou upon which Placide's cabin stood.

THE WOODS did not come down quite to the bayou,

where the land had been more or less cleared. It was lighter here, although the sun had sunk, and night was falling fast. Panting, Lebaudy stopped and looked back toward the trees. Running toward him from the forest was a woman, who slowed to a walk as he looked, too tired and shocked already to feel much fresh surprise at her appearance there. She came closer, so that he recognized her in the twilight.

It was Nita!

Lebaudy says she smiled at him; but it was the sort of smile that made new shivers crawl on that back of his.

"Good ev'nin', he says, remembering that Nita did not speak French.

He wondered why Nita was licking her red lips with her redder tongue. (From the way he speaks of it, when he will, one understands that Lebaudy did not care for this, at all!) He felt uneasy, it was so queer, you comprehend, when Nita did not answer him. Not a word from her — just licking her lips, staring at him, with that strange smile.

Lebaudy, one assumes, was at a loss to understand this situation, the woman saying nothing, and looking at him in a way that he did not at all care for. Finally he tells her, "I t'ought yo' run off wit' t' peddler."

Nita laughed . . . Lebaudy

says he shivered at the sound!

It was getting darker all this time, and Nita moved closer to him: still not making a sound beyond that one hellish laugh. Lebaudy watched her with a funny feeling in his flat stomach; and then he let out a yell — or one assumes he did, knowing this Lebaudy!

He says that he was looking at the same eyes all the time (which one doubts, because he does not like to look people in the eyes!), but one minute they were the eyes of Nita — as he knew Nita — and the next minute they were the eyes of — well, what do you think? The eyes of a great bitch wolf! A great she-wolf with slaving jowls, and a red tongue running in and out between fangs that glinted faintly in the dusk!

The wolf (or whatever it was!) leaped at Lebaudy, who undoubtedly howled as much as any wolf as he also leaped — backward, into the bayou. Now, only a very stupid one, such as this one, would leap unthinking and unlooking when he knew he was standing on the bank of a bayou. Yet, it may be that this stupidity saved Lebaudy from death, or worse. He struggled in the water, while the wolf yowled and slavered on the bank. Lebaudy says its eyes were red as hell's fires by this time. Eh!

Well, one know without being told, that a swamp rat like

Lebaudy could swim, and the farther bank was not very distant. He climbed up on it, and the wolf gave a last fiendish howl as Henry scampered off toward Labranch.

Wet and quaking, and feeling a certain need of stimulation, Lebaudy scurried in to old Marie's place, wet clothes and all. One drink, and Lebaudy would stand on his head. That is only an expression, you will understand, but it serves well for this old one, as what few brains he had would run out his mouth when he drank — which is a misfortune that might, perhaps, happen to a rattlebrain who stood too long upon his head in fact! However, if you understand me, he talked much when he drank a little.

He talked to Marie, telling her of his finding the corpse that was so different from other corpses, and of his meting with Nita, or the wolf (or both-in-one), or whatever it was, on the bank of the bayou. Then he went back and told her the whole story in detail, from the time he had seen Placide throw Nita to the floor and hurl that desecrated crucifix into her throat. Before he had finished, Marie was so shaken that she was drinking her own rotgut liquor, and pouring more for Henry — all without charge to him!

"Ay-e-el" she moaned. "The

black crucifix, the black cat jumping across her body in the grave, licking her blood. Moonlight in her eyes while she's lying in her grave! Oh, Placidel Stupid Placidel Why did you not drive a stake through her heart when you buried her?"

"Eh?" says Henry Lebaudy, "What's all this you're talking about?"

"*Loup-garou!*" snarls Marie, who was raised among people who speak French much better than, and in preference to, English; and she had absorbed all the folk-lore of those French-descended people. (Marie's white blood, one assumes, came from the same source as theirs.)

"*Loup-garou!*" shudders Lebaudy. (You comprehend that it is the French name for werewolf? So!) "I was afraid so, me!"

Marie brightens, after a minute.

"One good thing," she exults, "this Nita can't get off her island — and I'm not going *there!* Me, I don't intend to see her!"

Now, as you already know, Labranch bayou forks and flows into the bay in two separate streams, like a wishbone, making an island nearly fifteen miles long and about ten miles wide at the bay end. The point, you understand, is that the werewolf is supposed to be unable to cross running water . . . What? The vampire, also? Ex-

actly! This *loup-garou* which is, or was, Nita, is safely in a pen, unless she can get some one to carry her across the bayou in his arms — which I doubt!

There is only a little more to tell. Lebaudy, at Marie's urging, went with his tale to Father Soulin. Whether the good priest had a hand in it or not, I do not know: but the parish sexton (who, naturally enough, was not given to agitation in the presence of dead bodies) went into the woods and cut off the spade handle a little way above the peddler's body. After which he drove the end of the handle a little more firmly in the corpse, and then covered it up to rest in peace.

Now, of course, that left Placide to be looked after. The sexton sharpened the part of the spade handle (Placide's own spade handle!) that he had kept, and dealt with Placide as the peddler had been dealt with. And Placide's wounds had healed, although they had been greater by far than the peddler's; and he screamed and squirmed beneath the thrust of the stake, and settled back at peace, as the peddler had done. The sexton piled back the dirt on what had become, in a twinkling, a heap of bones and unpleasantness.

So (Delacroix concluded with a shrug of his shoulders), that is the tale as I have heard it. It happened, so they say,

when I was a boy, and I did not live in this parish then. Father Soulin has been dead these four years past, so you can not ask him.

Me, I don't know . . .

• • •

I DREW ON my pipe for a couple of minutes, considering Delacroix's tale the while. Finally, I asked, "What do you mean by saying you don't know? You don't believe any of that, do you?"

Delacroix merely gave repetition to his frequent and non-committal shrug; and I knew that, for all his better education and larger contact with the world, he would be as taciturn as any of his ilk when conversation took a turn he did not like.

I was sleepy, by this time, and smothered a yawn.

"All right," I laughed, "I'm going on over to my tent and turn in, and I hope none of those werewolves who have to lie in their graves between sun-up and sun-down have come to life tonight, to catch me on the way, nor come uninvited into my tent."

"They can't enter a house without an invitation," Delacroix rejoined, in all seriousness, "and one supposes that will apply to a tent, likewise."

I was tempted to laugh at his earnestness, but I had no

wish to wound his sensibilities, and so refrained.

"Perhaps, after all," he said, "it would be better if you were to sleep with me while you are here . . . Yes?"

"No," I carelessly shook my head. "I'll go on over . . ."

At this moment I broke off, as there came a light tapping upon the door of the shack.

To this day, I do not know why one of us did not say, "Come in." Instead, Delacroix, who was sitting close to the door, merely reached out and lifted the latch, the poorly hung door swinging inward of its own accord. At that, surprise kept either one of us from speaking for a minute, although I had sufficient presence of mind to rise from my seat upon a cracker box and say, "Good evening."

Standing just outside the doorway, framed in the light from within, was one of the most beautiful women (she was, apparently, little more than a girl) that I have ever seen. She was clad in rough, serviceable corduroy riding-breeches and flannel shirt, and I could see a laced boot on the one leg that the shadows failed to screen from my view.

Even though she was so clad — I write these next words with considerable deliberateness! — in garments that she could have obtained from any chance hunter in the swamps around

us, provided he were of slight stature, even, I say, though she was clad in such garments, there was no hiding the alluring femininity of her.

Before I could find wits and voice to speak to this astonishing apparition, the girl smiled and herself spoke — dashing my illusions. Her words, although there was an additional odd inflection, were the words of any unlettered Cajun girl of the swamp country.

"Ma car," she informed us, "it's bogged down on de o'ter side de bayou; an' ma ankle, Ah sprained it tryin' t' gat out . . . Will yo' gen'leman he'p me?"

However, if her words were crude, her voice was not, and there was a wistful note in it that touched me. I could see, now, that she was leaning heavily on a stick, and the boot had been removed from one stockingless foot. She moved the foot, as if to ease its pain, so that it was more in the light . . . Unshod feet that are beautiful are a rarity in women . . . I had been out in the swamps with a road camp for two long months; and, Cajun or no Cajun, this was Woman — and a beautiful woman, at that. As Delacroix would put it: Well!

"Certainly we will help you!" I was very gallant about it, hoping she would not be too fastidious to overlook my two days' growth of beard. I had

another thought: bold, but maybe . . . "And," I said, "as I see you can not stand upon that foot — I'll carry you back across the bridge!"

I stared at the look of wild exultation that leaped into the girl's wonderful eyes, enchanting with their vague suggestion of the Orient, before she dropped her gaze.

"No!" yelled Delacroix, to my utter astonishment and indignation. "*Carry her across running water?* No! Never!"

My anger was flaring swiftly, and then I caught sight of the girl. I stopped the hot rejoinder I had upon my tongue for Delacroix, appalled with doubt and something more.

There was a positively feral light in those glorious eyes, now; and that seductive mouth had ceased to be such.

"Landry!" Delacroix was yelling, "bring your gun, the one with the silver bullets — she's here!"

The girl leaped away toward the swamp growth — there was no sign of lameness in her going. I had a vague, confused impression that she looked oddly inhuman, and dropped to all fours as she reached the shelter of the forest!

Old Landry, he of the weathered face and gnarled hands who had first mentioned Placide's wife that night, came running up. There was a huge

revolver in one of those knotted fists.

Delacroix spoke to him in the French *patois* of the region, of which I knew enough to get the gist.

"Yes, it was *she* — but you are too late! She has reached the woods and you dare not follow — she and her pack would have your throat open before you knew they were near!"

"Silver bullets," was all I could understand of Landry's answer, taut as it was with suppressed emotion. Then, hoarsely, in which occurred the words, "My son," he croaked something else.

Delacroix shook his head. "Avenge him, and all the others, when the odds are even. Wait until you have another chance in the open."

"Eleven years!" said Landry, quite distinctly. "For so long have I carried this gun loaded with silver bullets blessed by the good Father — the only kind that can kill *them*! — waiting to use it."

Again Delacroix shook his head.

"We will be five or six months getting the road across the island. There will be other chances: you have waited eleven years, and you can surely wait a few months longer."

Delacroix slowly shut the

Come Closer

by Joanna Russ

Joanna Russ has appeared in our worthy competitor, *MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION*, and is a resident of New York City. Herein she offers a new twist on an old theme.

WELL, I'LL tell you, it began the day I was out on the Jewett Ridge looking for Sarah Howe's little boy that had got lost. All the school mothers were out that day. I took my husband's pickup truck because he was in Orne, talking to the contractors, and I loaded the back seat with blankets. That was for the boy; you know, it gets pretty cold up here in November. I don't know my way around too well and it was the afternoon before I got to the Cox house. I thought — well, you mustn't be too sensitive, so I parked the truck in

the driveway. I thought maybe someone new had moved in, even though people from around here don't like the place because it's set back so far from the road and that makes it hard in winter because of the snow. But it's a good, big place and a *pretty* place, and I don't care what anybody says, that's important; I think it's important to have a nice-looking house. The people who lived there before the Coxes planted some kind of trees along the driveway that stayed green all year; I don't mean pine trees, I mean real green leaves. I think it

must be a comfort for a woman to look out of the kitchen window and see a green tree in the middle of the snow. And they had squares of leaded glass set on each side of the front door, too, which is very pretty.

When I got there the trees had fruit — just imagine, fruit in November! — something like black plums, though the leaves were like *japonica*. Why, I was even going to pick some of it but then I saw that the trees had more and more as they went up nearer the house and the last one was bowed down just like a picture-book. Somebody was living there, all right. The paint was no good — you have to be careful up here because the weather gets at it — but there were clean curtains in the window and flowers, too. I think they were zinnias I don't know where they could get zinnias in November. I thought I would leave the truck and pick some fruit from the second tree, and then I thought, no, I would wait until I got to the next one because that had so much more, and then — well, I went up to the last one of all. I thought nobody would miss a plum from the last one. Only they weren't plums; I couldn't tell what they were. But it doesn't matter. I had only just put my hand up when a woman opened the kitchen door,

near the window with the flowers, so I pulled my hand back right away. You never know how people are going to take things. She was a tall, thin, gray-haired woman and to tell you the truth she didn't look any too nice. Most of us don't dress up exactly, but we don't go around in a faded dress that's down to the ground almost and lisle stockings.

"Goodness! you scared me," I said. She didn't say anything. I thought that there was somebody behind her, so I backed off a little and I said, "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to make any trouble." Then I got up my courage and I said, "I'm looking for a little boy. He's lost. He's wearing a blue raincoat."

Here she opened the door a little wider and she said, as if she'd just remembered it or maybe was ashamed of not being more neighborly, "Come in. Come in, Mrs. Mill."

"I don't know," I said, "I have to keep looking," but she shuffled her feet so in those awful, dirty slippers and I thought maybe she hardly saw anyone from one week to the next, poor soul, and had forgotten how to talk to people, so I said, "Yes, I will," and then I said "Thank you kindly."

Well, I have never seen such a place! That's all I can say. I don't mean it wasn't neat, because it was; it was neat

enough to make you wonder if anybody lived in it. But the dust! It was full of it. That woman took me into the kitchen, that was just as bad as the rest of the place, and padded around in those awful slippers opening cupboards and drawers and there was hardly a stick of food in the whole place, just a few old jars and things and a package of tea up on the shelf. She was humping her shoulders in the queerest way and she looked as if she were going to cry; she just stood in front of me with her head hanging down. I thought she must be some kind of loony so I said, "Don't you fret; you don't have to make me tea."

"MRS. MILL," she said, "Mrs. Mill, Mrs. Mill, Mrs. Mill," over and over and I thought to myself *Oh, no, she's crazy!* I turned to get out of there, but in two steps I had walked right into somebody and did I jump! I ran back into that kitchen as if I'd seen a ghost. But it was only a man — I guess it must have been her husband because he was just as old, only real dark like the Portuguese they have working on the roads. I don't mean he was one, I mean he was a dark-looking man.

"Don't you mind Millie," he said, "You just tell me your business." Then I saw he had a gun that he put down against

the wall; I guess he must have been hunting. I told him I had come to ask about the little Howe boy and he nodded. He said, "Millie can't tell you anything. She don't know anything," and then he gave her a push out of the kitchen. "Millie!" he shouted, "You show this lady upstairs."

"I have to be getting on . . ." I said. He nodded.

"She don't know anything," he said, "But you ask my boy. He knows," and he picked up that gun of his. I tell you, I felt better when I saw him go out the front door! His wife went up the stairs and I followed her, but I didn't dare say a word; I didn't know what she'd do. She would go into one room and look around it, and then into another, and it was one of those big farm houses, you know, that have ten or twelve rooms, and each time she went in she would stand still in the middle. But there was not a thing in one of them, not even a stick of furniture. When we went into the last one she stood there without saying a word, even though I asked her twice where her boy was. I went in to get her, but the moment I walked in that room somebody jumped out from behind the door and knocked into me.

"Oh, watch what you're doing, can't you!" I said, for it was a big boy of fourteen or

so, very tall but still full of baby fat. I supposed he thought it was a joke. "Mind yourself!" I said, real sharp, and then I turned to her and said, "Is this your boy?" But she only said, "We haven't got it."

"What do you mean?" I said. "What haven't you got? What are you talking about?" The boy bumped against her, foolishly, the way you'd kick somebody under the table to remind them of something. "What are you doing?" I said. He ran to a closet and searched around inside it — though from where I was standing it looked just as bare as bare — and he pulled out . . .

"That's Sarah's little boy's raincoat!" I said. "You give it to me!" but the big silly thing ran around behind his mother. I thought to myself that I had had just about enough and in a minute I was going to cry and I said, "You make that boy behave!"

"We haven't got it," she said.

"You give it to me!" I said. Then she lifted her head and looked me right in the face, and I tell you, my heart nearly stopped. I never saw such a face. She looked like a witch. She looked as if she'd killed somebody and was glad of it. I thought maybe they had killed the boy. I backed towards the door. Just when I reached it, I heard the pickup truck motor starting up outside. I

guess that did it! I mean, I know how my husband would feel if anybody took that truck. Why, our living is from that truck.

I didn't even stop for a moment; I ran right down the stairs and out the front door. I didn't even think of the poor little boy. I just ran to that truck and drove down the road. It wasn't till I came to the next house that I remembered that nobody had been in the truck, even though I heard it start up. And how did she know my name? I just drove away; I had the funny feeling that if I went back, the house would be just the same, with the front door shut even though I'd opened it and nobody around anywhere, just the house and the line of trees with the last tree loaded with fruit.

WHEN I GOT TO the village I went to Mrs. Post and told her the whole story. She'll tell you what I said. I had just got to when I came to the house when she broke in and said, "Honey, nobody lives there."

"Oh, yes they do!" I said.

"No they don't," she said. "Not in that place." She was sitting at the kitchen table with me. She pooh-poohed to herself the way she always does and pushed away a whole pile of papers to make room for the tea.

"Nonsense, love," she said, "I know the people who used to live there and they're dead. The Coxes. They died fifteen years ago when you were a girl. Everybody knew about it. Millie Cox turned the gas on herself and the other two. And I don't want to be mean, but it was a lucky thing for all, I'd say." Mrs. Post is the Notary Public for the whole ridge so she knows just about everything. "Millie was a distant cousin of my mother's," she said. "Everybody's related around here. She was a jealous, grabby woman."

"But I saw *somebody*."

"What did her in was that thing that happened to her boy," said Mrs. Post. "Not that he wasn't miserable enough before. He cried in school and tried to run away time and again. She couldn't leave him alone, I suppose. Well, when he was nine or so he ran away for good and when they found him a couple of days later — well, dear, we know it must have been strangers; it couldn't have anything to do with any of us — well, the truth if it is that the child said something about 'some men' and then he never said another word. It was clear to everyone that the boy would never grow up. Not in mind, I mean."

"Well, we were sorry, of course, but Millie wouldn't hear a kind word. She kept to

herself and brooded over it and brooded over it for nearly six years before she did it. Why, she would stop people in the street and ask them was it fair *her* boy had been chosen? She would come into school and make scenes; she would blame everybody; she would say she couldn't bear to see everyone else's lovely children — why, what's the matter with you, love, you're shaking like a leaf!"

"Oh Mrs. Post," I said, "Oh Mrs. Post," and I spilled my tea because my hand was shaking so. "They'll have to burn it down and take up the cellar!" for I had just remembered something that bothered me when I first walked inside and didn't know what to make of it.

Those flowers in the window were as dusty as everything else, and withered too — but only on one side. They looked so fresh from the outside, and the windows were so clean, and the window-curtains so white! But flowers can't be withered on just one side. I thought about the house again, the way it had looked, so homely and pleasant, with the line of trees winding up to it and bearing fruit even in November, with the best fruit always on the next tree, each tree saying: Come a little closer, come a little closer . . .

It was a child-trap.

BOOKS (continued from page 78)

TALES OF SCIENCE AND SORCERY

by Clark Ashton Smith; Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, 1964; 256pp; \$4.00. (Includes **Clark Ashton Smith: A Memoir**, by E. Hoffmann Price).

This is the fifth collection of stories by the late Clark Ashton Smith. The first two, *Out of Space and Time* and *Lost Worlds*, are long out of print and command high prices when they are available at all; the third and fourth, *Genius Loci* and *The Abominations of Yondo*, are still available from Arkham House @ \$3.00 and \$4.00 respectively. (Two volumes of verse, *The Dark Chateau* and *Spells and Philtres*, are also out of print. A third, *The Hill of Dionysus*, may still be available; see **MAGAZINE OF HORROR** November 1963 for details.)

For those whose fondness for this author's works moves them to desire a complete collection of his published tales, we need say only that the present volume is uniform in excellent makeup with the first four; that the memoir by Price is very interesting and includes two psychic experiences that Price had in relation to his friendship with Smith; and that both the front cover jacket by Utpatel and the back cover photograph by Emil Petaja are very fine. For others, I must add the caution that the best collections were the first three.

The present volume consists of the following tales: *Master of the Asteroid*, *The Seed From the Sepulcher*, *The Root of Ampoi*, *The Immortals of Mercury*, *Murder in the Fourth Dimension*, *Seedling of Mars*, *The Maker of Gargoyles*, *The Great God Awto*, *Mother of Toads*, *The Tomb-*

Spawn, *Schizoid Creator*, *Symposium of the Gorgon*, *The Theft of Thirty-Nine Girdles*, and *Morythylla*. Five of these, *The Seed From the Sepulcher*, *The Maker of Gargoyles*, *Mother of Toads*, *The Tomb-Spawn*, and *Morythylla* are in league with the tales that made Smith the favorite he is; the rest are lesser works, and two of the science fiction exhibits are embarrassingly poor — *The Immortals of Mercury* and *Seedling of Mars*; nor can I share in the enthusiasm for *The Great God Awto*, described as a "brief but effective satire". Brief it is, but its effect is undone by the heavy-handed ending. Those who enjoyed *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros* (in the *Lost Worlds* volume) will find *The Theft of Thirty-Nine Girdles* an amusing adventure of lesser impact, obviously taking place earlier in the thief's career. RAWL

PORTRAITS IN MOONLIGHT

by Carl Jacobi; Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, 1964; 213pp; \$4.00.

Contents of this second collection of weird and science fiction tales by Carl Jacobi consist of: *Portrait in Moonlight*, *Witches in the Cornfield*, *The Martian Calendar*, *The Corbie Door*, *Tepondicon*, *Incident at Galloping Horse*, *Made in Tanganyika*, *Matthew South and Company*, *Long Voyage*, *The Historian*, *Lodana*, *The Lorenzo Watch*, *The La Prellio Paper*, and *The Spanish Camera*.

With the exception of the brief and amusing *The Historian*, all the science fiction selections in this volume (*The Martian Calendar*, *Tepondicon*, *Made in Tanganyika*, *Long Voyage*, *Lodana*, and *The La Prellio Paper*) have weird aspects, and two of them — *The Martian Calendar*

and *The La Prelo Paper* — are among the five best in the volume. I would cite as the other three top tales, *Portrait in Moonlight*, *Witches in the Cornfield*, and *The Spanish Camera*, with the second of these three as best in the book.

All 14 tales are enjoyable, Utpatel's jacket picture is up to the level I have come to expect from him, and I can recommend this volume without hesitation. RAWL

We shall review, or at least mention, in this department all books sent to us, and from time to time comment upon items we come across upon the newsstands that seem worthy of bringing to your attention. Such as the following:

The January 1931 issue of *WEIRD TALES* carried part one of a serial by Frank Belknap Long; *The Horror From the Hills*. This short novel of a malignant cosmic entity called Chaugnar Faugn was originally planned for three-installment presentation; but the magazine shifted to bi-monthly publication with the next (February-March) issue, and parts two and three were run together. The story is "Lovecraftian" in its treatment of cosmic horror and its characters are little more developed than those you find in HPL's

works. No matter; even after thirty years, it still retains impact.

It is now available from Belmont Books (Belmont Productions, Inc., 66 Leonard Street, New York 100013), as part of the Belmont Future Series (L92-600), but you won't find it by looking for a soft-cover volume entitled *The Horror From the Hills*; it goes under the curious name of *Odd Science Fiction*, priced at 50c; the volume also contains two rather good short stories, *Flame of Life*, and *Giant in the Forest*.

The novel appears in the revised version which was published by Arkham House in 1963; and while I did not compare it with the original, reading the present edition did not leave me with the feeling that anything important was missing or changed for the worse. While it is too bad that the author did not take the opportunity offered by a new edition to strengthen the weaknesses in characterization, at the price that Belmont asks the story is worth buying for the horror-conception, which, in some respects has not been equalled even by HPL himself. The cover design itself is a good one, but the blurb is a little masterpiece of misinformation. Nonetheless . . . recommended: RAWL

In the November 1927 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, the text of the story, *The Astounding Discoveries of Doctor Mentiroso*, was broken up about halfway through the tale to present a large photograph of the author, A. Hyatt Verrill. Beneath the photo appeared the following paragraph: "One of our most versatile contributors, without question, is Mr. A. Hyatt Verrill. He is not only an author of note, but is an illustrator, naturalist, and explorer as well. The following is taken from *Who's Who in America*: 'Educated at Hopkins Grammar School, New Haven; Yale School of Fine Arts; special course on zoology under his father. Illustrated natural history department of *Webster's International Dictionary*, 1896; *Clarendon Dictionary*, many scientific reports and other publications. Mr. Verrill is also the inventor of the autochrome process of photography in natural colors, in 1902. Extensive explorations in Bermuda, West Indies, Guiana, Central America, and Panama, 1889 to 1920. Rediscovered supposedly extinct *Solenodon paraxodus* in Santa Domingo, 1907. Now connected with Museum of American Indian. Author of 48 books, among which the following are the best known: *Harper's Aircraft Book*, *Harper's Wireless Book*, *Getting Together with Latin America*, *Home Radio*, *Radio Detective Series*, *Deep Sea Hunters in the South Seas*. Contributor of numerous articles and stories to magazines, etc.' "

Born in 1871, Verrill was 56 the year this little profile was reprinted in *AMAZING STORIES*. He had first appeared in the October 1926 issue with a two-part serial, *Beyond the Pole* (which was the first new serial to appear in the magazine), and was the first author of a new serial to cop a cover illustration. All of his 26 science fiction tales, of which two were long novels, and six short novels published serially, appeared in *AMAZING STORIES* and *AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY*; three weird or fantasy tales appeared in *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* and *STRANGE STORIES*. In 1959, Donald H. Tuck's two-volume *A Handbook of Science Fiction and Fantasy* would credit him with over 100 non-fictional books, of which the last three, *Strange Story of Our Earth* (1952; Page, Boston), *America's Ancient Civilizations* (in collaboration with his wife, Ruth Verrill; Putnam, 1952) and *The Real Americans* (Putnam, 1954) appeared after he was 80; he died in 1954 at the age of 83. Among his final magazine appearances were a series of articles about American Indians, which the writer had the pleasure of running in various Western magazines when we were editing the Columbia chain of pulps. One of his finest science fiction novels, *The Bridge of Light*, was put into hard covers by Fantasy Press, 1950, and certainly merits soft-cover reprint.

The present story is science fiction in that it is based upon biological speculation and is treated in a strictly materialistic manner — nothing supernatural here — but the manner and content of the tale is solidly in the classic horror tradition and we think you will agree that it belongs in our pages.

The Plague Of The Living Dead

by A. Hyatt Verrill

THE ASTOUNDING occurrences which took place upon the island of Abilene many years ago, and which culminated in the most dramatic and most remarkable event in the history of the world, have never been made public. Even the vague rumors of what happened in the island republic were regarded as fiction or as the work of imagination, for the truth has been most zealously and carefully concealed. Even the press of the island co-operated with the officials in their desire to maintain absolute secrecy regarding what was taking place, and instead of making capital of the affair, the papers

merely announced — as the government had requested them to do — that an unknown, contagious disease had broken out upon the island and that a most rigid quarantine was being enforced.

But even if the incredible news had been blazoned to the world, I doubt if the public would have believed it. At any rate, now that it is forever a thing of the past, there is no reason why the story should not be told in all its details.

When the world-famous biologist, Dr. Gordon Farnham, announced in 192— that he had discovered the secret of prolonging life indefinitely, the

world reacted to the news in various ways. Many persons openly scoffed and declared Dr. Farnham was either in his dotage or else had been misquoted. Others, familiar with the doctor's attainments and his reputation for conservative statements, expressed their belief that, incredible as it might seem, it must be true; while the majority were inclined to treat the matter as a joke. This was the attitude of nearly all the daily papers; the Sunday supplements had elaborately illustrated but entirely unfounded and ridiculous stories purporting to voice the doctor's views and statements on the subject.

Only one paper, the reliable, conservative, and somewhat out of date *Examiner* saw fit to print the biologist's announcement verbatim and without comment. Upon the vaudeville stage, and over the radio, jokes based on Dr. Farnham's alleged discovery were all the rage; a popular song in which immortality and the scientist were the leading themes was heard on every side and at length. In sheer desperation, Dr. Farnham was forced to make public a detailed statement of his discovery. In this, he clearly pointed out that he had not claimed to have learned the secret of prolonging human life indefinitely, for, in order to prove that he had done so it would be necessary to keep a human be-

ing alive for several centuries, and even then the treatment might merely have prolonged life for a certain period and not forever. His experiments, he stated, had hitherto been confined to the lower animals and by his treatment of them he had been able to extend their normal span of life four to eight times. In other words, if the treatment worked equally well with human beings, a man would live for five to eight hundred years — quite long enough to fulfill most persons' ideas of immortality. Certain persons, whose names he declined to reveal, had taken his treatment, the doctor stated, but of course its effect had not yet had time to prove his claims. He added that the treatment was harmless, that a chemical preparation injected into the system figured in it, and that he was willing to treat a limited number of persons if they wished to experiment and test the efficacy of his discovery. For Dr. Farnham, who was sparing of words both in conversation and writing, and who rarely gave out anything for publication, this statement was remarkable and, so his champions claimed, proved that he was sure of his stand. But such is the psychology of the average person, the biologist's perfectly logical and straightforward explanation, instead of convincing the public or the press, served

merely to bring an even greater storm of ridicule upon his head.

Curious crowds gathered about his laboratory. Wherever he went he was stared at, laughed at and watched. At every turn press photographers snapped cameras at him. Hardly a day passed without some new and humorous or sarcastic article appearing in the press and his pictures appeared along with those of crooks, murderers, society divorcees and prize-fighters in the illustrated tabloid newspapers. To a man, of Dr. Farnham's retiring habits, self-consciousness and modesty, all this was torture, and finally, unable to endure his unwelcome publicity longer, he packed up his belongings and slipped quietly and secretly away from the metropolis, confiding the secret of his destination to only a few of his most intimate scientific friends. For a space his disappearance created something of a stir, and further sensational news for press and public; but in a short time, he and his alleged discovery were forgotten.

Doctor Farnham, however, had no intention of abandoning his researches and experiments and, together with his supposedly immortal menagerie, as well as three aged derelicts who had offered themselves for treatment, and who had agreed to remain with

the scientist indefinitely — at larger salaries than they had ever received before — he moved to Abilene Island. Here he was wholly unknown, and scarcely an inhabitant had ever heard of him or his work. He purchased a large abandoned sugar estate and here, he thought, he could carry on his work unnoticed and unmolested. But he did not take into consideration his three human experiments.

These worthies, finding that their treatment was having its effects and that they were remaining, as it were, steadfast in years and vigor, and quite convinced that they would continue to live on forever, could not resist boasting of the fact to those whom they met. The white residents listened and laughed, deeming the fellows a little mad, while the colored population regarded the doctor's patients with superstitious awe, and were convinced that Doctor Farnham was a most powerful and greatly to be feared "Obeah man."

The fact that his secret and his reasons for being on the island had leaked out, did not, however, interfere with Doctor Farnham's work as he had dreaded. The intelligent folk, who were in the minority, of course, jokingly referred to what they had heard when they met the scientist, but never

asked him seriously if there was any truth in the story, while the majority avoided him as they would Satan himself and gave his grounds a wide berth, for which he was thankful. But, on the other hand, he had no opportunities to try out his immortality treatment on human beings, and hence was obliged to carry on his experiments with the lower animals.

Quite early in the course of his experiments, he had discovered that while his treatment halted the ravages of time on vertebrates, and the creatures or human being treated gave every promise of living on indefinitely, yet it did not restore them to youth. In other words, a subject treated with his serum remained in the same condition, physically and mentally, as existed when the treatment was administered, although, to a certain extent, there was an increase in the development of muscles, an increased flexibility of joints, a softening of hardened arteries and a greater activity, due perhaps, to the fact that the vital organs were not being worked to their limit to stave off advancing age.

Thus the oldest — in point of years — of the doctor's human experiments was to all external appearances over ninety, (his exact age was ninety-three when he had taken the treatment) or

precisely as he had appeared when, two years previously, he had submitted his ancient frame to the doctor's injections. His gums were toothless, his scanty hair was snow white, his face was as seamed and gnarled as a walnut, and he was bent, stoop-shouldered and scrawny-necked. But he had thrown aside his glasses, he could see as well as any man, his hearing was acute, and he was as lively as a cricket and physically stronger than he had been for years, and he ate like a sailor. For all he or the scientist could see he would go on in this state until the crack of doom, barring accidents, for each day his blood pressure, his temperature, his pulse and his respiration were carefully noted, microscopic examinations were made of his blood, and so far, not the least sign of any alteration in his condition, and not the least indication of any increase in age, had been detected.

II

BUT DOCTOR FARNHAM was not satisfied with this. If his discovery was to be of real value to the human race, he would have to learn how to restore at least a little of lost youth, as well as to check age; and day and night he worked trying to discover how to accomplish the impossible.

Countless rabbits, guinea pigs, dogs, monkeys and other creatures were treated, innumerable formulae were worked out and tested, endless and involved experiments were made, and volumes of closely written and methodically tabulated observations filled the shelves of Doctor Farnham's library.

But still, he seemed as far from the desired result as ever. He was not, in his own estimation, trying to perform a miracle, nor was he striving to bring about the impossible. The human system, or that of any creature, was, he argued, merely a machine, a machine which, through marvelously perfected and most economical means, utilized fuel in the form of food to produce heat, power, and motion, and which in addition constantly replaced the worn parts of its own mechanism. The presence of a soul or spirit, as anything divine or incomprehensible, the biologist would not admit, although he willingly granted that life, which actuated the machine, was something which no man could explain or could create. But, he argued, this did not necessarily mean that, sooner or later, the secret of life might not be discovered. Indeed, he affirmed, it was the machine of the body which produced life, rather than life which actuated the machine. And, fol-

lowing this line of reasoning, he would hold that the spirit or soul, or as he preferred to call it, "the actuative intelligence," was the ultimate product, the goal so to speak, of the entire machinery of the organic body.

"The unborn embryo," he once said, "is capable of independent motion, but not of independent thought. It does not breathe, it does not produce sounds, it neither sleeps nor wakes, and it does not obtain nourishment by eating. Neither does it pass excrement. In other words, it is a completed machine as yet inoperative by its own power, a mechanism like an engine with banked fires, ready to be set in motion and to produce results when the steam is turned on. This moment is the time of birth. With the first breath, the machinery starts in motion; cries issue from the vocal organs; food is demanded, waste matter is thrown off and steadily, ceaselessly, the machine continues gradually forming and building up the intelligence until it has reached its highest state, whereupon, the machine, having accomplished its purpose, begins to slow down, to let its worn out parts remain worn, until at last, it is clogged, erratic and finally fails to function."

So, having decided, to his entire satisfaction, that any liv-

ing creature was in its basic principles a machine, Doctor Farnham felt that in order to keep the machine running forever it was only necessary to provide for the replacement of worn out units and to provide an inducement for the "actuating intelligence" to keep the mechanism going after it had fulfilled its original purpose. And to all intents and purposes, the scientist had accomplished this. Animals which he had treated, and which under his care and observation had lived on for several times their normal span of life, at no time showed any signs of hardening of the blood vessels, or the accumulation of lime in the system, or of glandular deterioration.

Moreover, the doctor had discovered that creatures which had been treated could propagate their race, although normally they would have been sterile through age, and he grew wildly excited over this, for, if his conclusions were correct, the young of these supposedly immortal animals would inherit immortality. But here Doctor Farnham ran against a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to propagating a race of immortals. A litter of young rabbits remained, for month after month, the same helpless, blind, naked, embryonic things they had been at birth. No doubt they would have contin-

ued in that state forever had not the mother, perhaps growing impatient or disgusted with her offspring, devoured the entire litter. However, it proved that the power of inheriting the results of the treatment existed, and Doctor Farnham felt sure that in time he could work out some scheme by which the young would develop to any desired stage of life before the cessation of age took effect, and they would then remain indefinitely in that state. Herein, he felt assured, lay the solution to the restoration of youth. Not that he could restore old age to youth, but that, provided he discovered the means, all future generations would — if they desired — attain vigorous manhood or womanhood and would then cease to increase in age and would forever remain at the very pinnacle of mental and physical power. It was while conducting his researches in this direction that Doctor Farnham accidentally made a most amazing discovery which quite altered his plans.

He had been working on an entirely new combination of the constituents of his original product, and in order to test its penetrative peculiarities, he injected a little of the fluid into a chloroformed guinea pig, so as to determine the progress of the material through the various organs. To his utmost

astonishment the supposedly dead animal at once began to move, and, before the astounded doctor's eye, was soon running about as lively as ever. Doctor Farnham was speechless. The little creature had been supposedly dead for hours — its body had even been stiff, and yet here it was obviously very much alive.

Could it be that the guinea pig had merely been in a state of anesthesia? Or was it possible — and Doctor Farnham trembled with excitement at the idea — that his serum had actually restored life to the animal?

Scarcely daring to hope that this was the case, the scientist quickly secured a rabbit from his stock, and placing it under a bell glass administered enough ether to have killed several men. Then, forcing himself to be patient, he waited until the rabbit's body was cold and *rigor mortis* had set in. Even then the doctor was not satisfied. He examined the rabbit's eyes, listened with a most delicate stethoscope for possible heart beats, and even opened a vein in the animal's leg. There could be no question, the rabbit was dead. Then, with nervous but steady fingers, the doctor inserted the point of his hypodermic needle in the rabbit's neck and injected a small quantity of the new liquid. Almost immediately the rabbit's

legs twitched, its eyes opened, and as the doctor gazed incredulously, the creature rose to its feet and hopped off.

III

HERE *was* a discovery! The serum with its new constituents would not only check the inroads of age but it would restore life!

But Doctor Farnham was a hard-headed scientist and not a man given to imaginative romancing, and he fully realized that there must be limitations to his discovery. It could not, he felt sure, restore life to a creature which had met a violent death through injury to a vital organ, nor to a creature which had died from some organic disease. In coming to this conclusion he was unconsciously comparing living things with machinery, as usual. "One might stop the pendulum of a clock," he wrote, "and the mechanism will cease to function until the pendulum is again put in motion; but if the clock stops through loss of a wheel or broken spring or cogs, it cannot be made to function again unless the broken parts are replaced or repaired."

But would his treatment revive animals which had succumbed to death by other means than anesthetics? That was a most important matter to settle, and Doctor Farnham

immediately proceeded to settle it. For his first experiment, a kitten was sacrificed to the cause of science, and was humanely and very thoroughly drowned. In order that his experiment might be the more conclusive, the biologist decided to delay his attempted resurrection until all possibility of ordinary means of resuscitation were at an end; he set four hours as the time which he would permit to elapse before he injected his serum in the defunct cat. In the meantime, he prepared for another test. He had mentally checked off the various causes of premature death, aside from those by organic disease and violence, and found that drowning, freezing, gas-poisoning, and poisoning by non-irritant poisons led the list; after these came fright, shock, and various other rare causes.

It might be difficult to provide subjects killed by all of these means, but he could test the efficacy of his treatment on the more important ones, so he proceeded to prepare subjects by freezing, gassing, and poisoning a number of animals. By the time these corpses had been made ready, the dead cat had reposed upon his laboratory table for the allotted four hours, and, with pulse quickened in a wholly unscientific manner, Doctor Farnham forced a dose of his compound into

the kitten's neck. In exactly fifty-eight seconds by the doctor's watch, the cat's muscles twitched, its lungs began to breathe, its heart commenced to resume its interrupted functions, and at the expiration of two minutes and eighteen seconds, the kitten was sitting up and licking its damp and bedraggled fur. The experiments with the frozen, gassed and poisoned subjects were equally successful, and Doctor Farnham was thoroughly convinced that, barring injuries, deterioration of vital organs, or excessive loss of blood, any dead animal could be brought back to life by his process. Naturally, he was most anxious to test the marvelous compound on human beings, and he at once hurried to the coroner's office with a request that he might try a new form of resuscitation on the next person drowned or poisoned on the island. Then he visited the hospital in the hopes of finding some unfortunate who had expired through some cause which had not wrought injury to the vital organs, but was again disappointed. However, the authorities promised to notify him if such a case as he desired turned up; he returned to his laboratory to carry on more extensive tests.

Among other matters, he wished to determine how long a creature could remain dead

and yet be revived, and, with this end in view, he began a wholesale slaughter of his menagerie intending to label each body and carry on a progressive series of experiments, each animal being allowed to remain dead a certain number of hours, until his injections failed to restore life, thus enabling him to determine the exact limits of its efficacy.

It so happened that, in the excitement and interest of his discovery, he had neglected to place the resurrected kitten in a cage; during his absence from the laboratory, his servant — the youngest of the three human immortals — found the creature loose and, thinking it had escaped from its pen, replaced it with the other cats. And later, when the doctor selected half a dozen healthy-looking cats as martyrs to science, he inadvertently included the animal which, a few hours previously, he had brought back from death.

Together with its fellow felines, the resurrected kitten was placed in an air-tight chamber into which lethal gas was forced, and wherein the cats were allowed to remain for nearly an hour. Feeling certain the deadly fumes had most thoroughly done their work, the doctor, wearing a gas-mask, opened the chamber preparatory to removing the bodies of the deceased creatures. Imagine

his amazement when, as the cover was removed, a bristling, meowing cat sprang from within and, racing across the room, leaped upon a table, spitting and snarling and most obviously very much alive.

"Extraordinary! Most extraordinary!" exclaimed the scientist, as he cautiously peered into the chamber and saw the other cats stretched lifeless within. "A most remarkable example of natural immunity to the effects of hydrocyanic acid gas. I must make a note of the fact."

After considerable difficulty in mollifying the irate creature, Doctor Farnham examined her most carefully. In doing so he noticed a small wound upon the cat's neck and uttered a surprised ejaculation. This was the very cat he had resuscitated! The mark upon its neck was where he had inserted his hypodermic needle, and across his brain flashed a wild, impossible thought. The cat was immortal! Not only would it resist death by age indefinitely, but it could not be killed!

But the next instant, the scientist's common sense came to his rescue. "Of course," he reasoned, "that is impossible; absolutely preposterous."

But, after all, he thought, was it any more preposterous than bringing dead creatures back to life? There might be some unknown effect of his

treatment which rendered creatures subjected to it immune to certain poisons. But if so, then other means would destroy the cat's life, and, anxious to prove this theory, he secured the cat and proceeded to drown her the second time. Having left her immersed in water for a full hour, Doctor Farnham lifted the wire basket containing the supposedly defunct kitten from the tank, and the next second leaped back as if he had been struck. Within the close-meshed container the cat was scratching, yowling, fighting like a fury to escape, and evidently very much alive and most highly indignant at having been immersed in the cold water.

IV

UNABLE TO believe his senses, Doctor Farnham sank into a chair and mopped his forehead while the cat, having at last freed itself, dashed like a mad thing about the room and finally sought refuge under a radiator.

Presently, however, the doctor recovered his accustomed self-possession, and considered the seeming miracle more calmly. After all, he thought, the cat had been restored to life after drowning, so why was it not possible that having once been resuscitated, it could not thereafter be drowned, even

though subject to death through other means? But then again, the creature had also survived the gas. Here was something that must be investigated. He would try freezing the cat — he chuckled to himself as he thought of the time-honored saying that cats had nine lives — and if the beast still refused to succumb he would test every other means. But the cat had other ideas on the subject and, having had quite enough of the doctor's experiments, it eluded the scientist's grasp, and with arched back and fluffed-out tail sprang through a partly-opened window and vanished forever in the shrubbery of the open spaces.

Doctor Farnham sighed. Here was a most valuable and interesting experiment lost, but he soon consoled himself. He recollected that he still had a rabbit and a guinea pig which had also been revived from an apparently dead state, and he could carry out his tests on these.

And the doctor became more and more astounded as his tests proceeded. The two creatures were frozen as stiff as boards, but no sooner had they thawed out than they were as healthy and lively as before; they were gassed, chloroformed, poisoned, and electrocuted but all to no purpose. They could not be put to sleep by anesthetics and they could not be killed. At last the

scientist was forced to believe that his treatment literally rendered living things immortal.

And when at last he was convinced, and had assured himself that he was still sane, he threw himself into a chair and roared with laughter.

What would the papers back in the States say to this? Not only could human beings live on forever, so far as age was concerned, but they would be immune from the most common causes of accidental death. Persons going on sea voyages would have no dread of disaster for they could not be drowned. Electricians need have no fear of live wires or third rails for they could not be killed by any current. Arctic explorers could be frozen solid but would revive when thawed out. And half the terrors of war, the deadly gases on which such vast sums had been spent and to which so many years of research had been devoted, now meant nothing, for an army treated with the marvelous compound would be immune to the effects of the most fatal gases.

The doctor's head fairly whirled with the ideas that crowded his brain, but still he was not entirely satisfied. He had proved his amazing discovery by testing it on the lower animals, but was he positive that it would perform the

same miracles on human beings? He thought of trying it on his three companions, but hesitated. Supposing he drowned, poisoned, or gassed one of the three old men and the fellow failed to revive? Would he not be guilty of murder in the eyes of the law, even if the subject had willingly submitted to the test? And dared he actually take the risk? Doctor Farnham shook his head as he thought on this. No, he admitted to himself, he would not dare risk it. Many times, he knew, experiments which were perfectly successful with the lower animals, were anything but successful when applied to men. And then again, if he could not test his discovery on human beings, how would he ever be sure that it would or would not render mankind immortal?

Possibly, he decided, by dissecting one of his immortal creatures, he might discover something which would throw light on the matter. And then a puzzled, troubled frown wrinkled his forehead. He was thoroughly antagonistic to vivisection; and yet, how could he dissect one of his creatures without practicing vivisection? Of course, he thought, he could kill the rabbit by a blow on the back of the head, by piercing the brain painlessly with a lancet or by decapitating it. But in that case he might be de-

stroying the very thing which he was in search of.

Still, that was the only way: Not even in the interests of science, nor to set his mind at rest, would he willingly torture any living thing. But he could kill the rabbit by injuring its brain and kill the guinea pig by an equally painless death by way of its heart, and thus be reasonably sure of having both the nervous and circulatory systems uninjured.

So, rather regretfully, he picked up the unsuspecting rabbit, and with the utmost care and precision, he thrust a slender-bladed scalpel into the base of the creature's brain.

The next instant his instrument fell from his hand, he felt faint and weak, and he sat staring with gaping jaw and unbelieving eyes. Instead of becoming instantly limp in death at the thrust, the rabbit was quite unconcernedly nibbling a bit of carrot, and appeared as much alive and as healthy as before!

Doctor Farnham now felt convinced that he had gone mad. The excitement, the nerve strain, his long hours of experimenting had caused him to have hallucinations, for he well knew that no matter how remarkable his discovery had actually proved, no warm-blooded vertebrate could survive a scalpel thrust in its brain.

V

HE SHOOK himself, rubbed his eyes, pinched himself. He looked about his laboratory, gazed at the palm trees and shrubbery of the grounds about his dwelling, perused a few pages of a book, and put himself to a dozen tests. In every respect he seemed in his normal senses.

Something, he reasoned, must have gone wrong. By some error he had failed to reach a vital spot, and forcing himself to calmness, and steadying his nerves by a tremendous effort, he again picked up his lancet, and holding the rabbit's head immovable, he ran the full length of the razor-edged blade into the animal's brain.

And then he almost screamed and, limp and faint, slumped into his chair, while the rabbit, shaking its head and wiggling its ears as if a bit uncomfortable, hopped from the table and began sniffing about for bits of carrot which had dropped to the floor!

For fully half an hour the biologist remained, inert, entirely overcome, his nerves shaken, his brain in a whirl. How could such a thing be possible?

At last, slowly, almost fearfully, Doctor Farnham rose, and with determination written on his features, he secured the guinea pig and, by an al-

most superhuman exercise of will power, he stretched the animal upon a table and deliberately ran a scalpel through its heart. But, aside from a small amount of blood which issued from the wound, the creature appeared absolutely uninjured. Indeed it did not seem to suffer any pain and made no effort to escape when released.

For the first time in his life, Doctor Farnham swooned.

When, nearly an hour later, his henchman, frightened half out of his wits, managed to revive the scientist, darkness had fallen, and, trembling and utterly unnerved, Doctor Farnham staggered from his laboratory, scarcely daring to look about and wondering if it had all been some nightmare or the hallucination of his fainting fit.

It was a long time before he recovered his usual calm, and having forced himself to view the two animals which, by all accepted theories and scientific facts, should be stiff in death, were enjoying excellent health, and having braced himself by a hearty meal and some fifty-year-old rum, the doctor set himself to face incontrovertible facts and to determine the reasons therefore.

From the time he had entered his senior year at college, he had devoted himself to the study of biology. No other bi-

ologist living had won such an enviable reputation as a master of the science. No other biologist had made more important or world-famous discoveries. No other scientist could boast of such a voluminous and complete library or a more valuable and perfect collection of instruments, apparatus, and paraphernalia for studying in his chosen field, for Doctor Farnham was fortunate in being immensely wealthy, and he devoted all his income to his science. Although thoroughly revolutionary and unconventional in his theories, his experiments and his beliefs, yet he was willing to admit that no man can know everything, and that the most exact and careful persons will at times make mistakes. Hence, even if he did not entirely agree with them, he consulted all available works of other biologists, and, very often, he would find much of value in their monographs and reports. Also, on more than one occasion, he had seized upon some statement or apparently unimportant data which had been passed by with cursory mention, and built meaningfully upon it, giving full credit to his source.

So now, faced with an impossible fact, Doctor Farnham proceeded to get at basic facts. To describe in detail all his deductions, to analyze his reasonings, or to mention the au-

thoritative confirmations — in a dozen languages, which led to his final conclusions — would be impossible. But, as transcribed in his notes, which he jotted down as he worked, they were as follows:

“No one can exactly define life and death. What is fatal to one form of animal life may be innocuous to other forms. A worm or an amoeba, as well as many invertebrates, may be subdivided, cut into several pieces, and each fragment will continue to survive and will suffer no inconvenience. Moreover, under certain conditions, two or more of these fragments may join and heal together in their original form. Some vertebrates, such as lizards and turtles, may survive injuries which would destroy life in other creatures, but which, in their cases, produce no ill effects. Cases are numerous in which such organs as hearts or even brains have been removed from tortoises, and yet the creatures survived and were able to move about and eat for considerable periods. We speak of vital organs, but can we say which organs *are* vital? An accidental injury to the brain, heart, or lungs may cause death, and yet even more serious injuries may be inflicted by surgeons and the patient will survive. A human nose, ear or even a finger, if severed, may be made to grow to the

stump, but a limb once severed cannot be rejoined. But why not? Why should it be possible to graft certain organs or portions of anatomy and not others? One man may be shot through the brain or heart and may be instantly killed, while another may have several bullets fired through his brain or may be shot or stabbed through the heart and may live in perfect health for years thereafter. Even so-called vital organs may be removed by surgery without visibly affecting the patient's health, whereas an injury to a non-essential organ may produce death in another. It is not uncommon for persons to die of hemorrhage from a pin prick or a superficial abrasion of the skin, while it is equally common for persons to survive the loss of a limb by an accident or the severing of an artery.

“Life is customarily defined as a condition wherein the various organs are functioning, when the heart beats and the respiratory system is in operation. Conversely, a person or other animal is ordinarily considered dead when the organs cease to function and heart and lung actions cease. But, in innumerable cases of suspended animation, all organs cease functioning and there are no audible or visible traces of heart or lung action. In cases of immersion or drowning, the

same conditions exist, the blood ceases to flow through arteries and veins, and the victim, if left to himself, will never revive. But by artificial respiration and other means he may be resuscitated. Is the drowned person alive or dead?

"To sum up: It is impossible to define life or death in exact or scientific terms. It is impossible to state definitely when death takes place until decomposition sets in. It is impossible to say what causes life or produces death. No one has ever yet determined the uses or functions of many glands, and no one can explain the precise action of stimulants, narcotics, sedatives or anesthetics.

"Is it not possible or even probable that, under certain conditions, life may continue uninterrupted despite causes which ordinarily would result in death? Is it unreasonable to suppose that certain chemical reactions may be produced which will so act upon the vital organs and tissues that they resist all attempts to destroy their functions?

"My contention is that such things are possible. That, scientifically speaking, there is no more reason for an animal surviving the removal of its kidney, stomach, spleen or ductless glands, or injuries to these organs, than for surviving similar injuries to or the removal of the heart, brains or lungs."

Here the doctor dropped his pen, pushed aside his pad and books, and became buried in thought. He had, after all, learned nothing he did not already know. He had come back to his starting point. In fact, he had already answered his own queries and had proved his contention. But his studies and researches had started new trains of thought. Never before had he been so close to the mystery of life and death. Never before had it occurred to him that life might be a thing entirely apart from the mere physical organism — the machine, as he called it. And if his theories were correct, if his deductions were sound, could he not then restore life to a creature killed by violence or whose organs were injured or diseased? And where might his discovery not lead? If a creature could be so treated that it could resist death by drowning, by gassing, poisoning, freezing and electrocution, and the perforation of heart or brains, would it be possible to deprive that creature of life by any means? Even if the animal were cut into pieces, if its head were severed from its body, would it die? Or would it, like the earthworm or the amoeba, continue to live, and living, would the parts reunite and function as before?

Suddenly the scientist leaped

from his chair as if a spring had been released beneath him. He had it at last! That was the solution! No one had been able to explain why certain forms of life could be subdivided without injury, while other forms succumbed to comparatively slight injuries.

But whatever the reason, whatever the difference between the lower and higher animals as regards life and death, he had bridged the gap. By his discovery the warm-blooded invertebrates were rendered as indestructible as animalcules.

Yes, it must be so; it must be that by his treatment, a mammal could survive the same mutilation as an earthworm. Doctor Farnham rushed to his laboratory, seized the rabbit and, without the least qualms or hesitation, severed the head from the body.

And although he had been prepared for it, although he was confident of the result, yet he paled, and staggering back, grasped a chair for support, when the headless creature continued to hop about, erratically and aimlessly, but fully alive, while the bodiless head wiggled its nose, waved its ears and blinked its eyes as if wondering what had become of its body. Hastily picking up the living body and the living head, he placed them together, sewed and splinted them se-

curely in position, and elated at the success of his experiment, placed the apparently contented and non-suffering rabbit in its cage. But there was still one experiment Doctor Farnham had not tried. Could he resuscitate a creature killed by violence? He would soon find out; and securing a healthy hare he mercifully and painlessly killed it by a thrust in its brain, and immediately prepared to inject a dose of his almost magical preparation into the dead animal's veins.

But the test was never made

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VI

AS EVERYONE knows, Abilone Island is of volcanic formation and is subject to frequent earthquakes. Hence, while during the past few days earth tremors had been felt, no one gave much attention to them, and even Doctor Farnham, who subconsciously noted that one or two tremors had been unusually severe, was merely disturbed because they interfered with his work and the adjustment of his delicate instruments.

Now, as he bent above the dead body of the hare, his hypodermic syringe in hand, a terrific quake shook the earth; the floor of the laboratory rose and fell; the walls cracked; glass came slithering down from the skylight; beakers, bell-glasses,

retorts, test-tubes, jars and porcelain dishes toppled to the floor in a clash of shattered fragments; tables and chairs were overturned, and the doctor was thrown violently against the wall. It was no time for hesitating, no time for scientific experiments, and Doctor Farnham, being thoroughly human and quite alive to his own danger, dashed from the wrecked laboratory to the open air, still grasping his syringe in one hand and a vial of his preparation in the other. Quite forgetting that they were supposedly immortal, his three aged companions rushed screaming with terror from the crumbling dwelling and, scarcely able to keep their feet, nauseated and dizzy from the rocking, oscillating earth shocks which followed one another in rapid succession, the four gazed speechless and awed as the buildings were reduced to shapeless ruins before their eyes.

But the worst was yet to come. Following upon quakes, came a deafening, awful roar — the sound of a terrific explosion that seemed to rend the universe. The sky grew black; bright daylight gave way to twilight; the palm trees bent with a howling gale, and, unable to stand, the four men threw themselves flat upon their faces.

"An eruption!" shouted the

doctor, striving to make himself heard above the howling wind, the explosive concussions that sounded like the detonations of shell-fire, and the thrashing of palm-fronds. "The volcano is in eruption," he repeated. "The crater of Sugar Loaf has burst into activity. We are probably out of danger, but thousands of people may have been destroyed. God pity the villagers upon the mountain slopes!"

Even while he spoke, dust and ashes began to fall, and soon, the earth, the vegetation, the ruins of the buildings and the men's clothing were covered with a gray coating of the volcanic ash. But presently the dust ceased to fall, the wind died down, the explosions grew fainter and occurred at longer intervals and the four shaken and terrified men rose to their feet and gazed about upon a landscape they would never have recognized.

The houses, outbuildings, laboratory and library were utterly destroyed, for fire had broken out and had completed the destruction of the earthquake, and Doctor Farnham's priceless books, his invaluable instruments, his work of years were gone forever. Somewhere under the heap of blazing ruins lay the formulae and ingredients for his elixir of immortality; somewhere in the smoking pile reposed the bodies of the

creatures which had proved its efficacy, and sadly, unable to voice the immensity of his loss, Doctor Farnham stood regarding what had so shortly before been his laboratory. Suddenly, from beneath the piles of debris, a brown and white creature appeared, and with a confused glance about, scuttled off into the weeds and brush. The scientist stared, rubbed his eyes and gasped. That any living thing could have survived that catastrophe seemed impossible. And then he broke into hysterical laughter. Of course! He had forgotten! It was the immortal guinea pig! And scarcely had his explanation dawned upon him when, from another pile of blackened, shattered masonry and timbers, a second animal appeared. Like a man bereft of reason the doctor stared incredulously at the apparition — a large white rabbit, its neck swathed in bandages and adhesive tape. There could be no doubt of it. It was the rabbit whose head had been severed from its body and then replaced! All of the biologist's scientific ardor came back with a rush at sight of this incredible demonstration of the miraculous nature of his discovery, and leaping forward, he attempted to capture the little rodent. But he was too late. With a bound, the rabbit gained a clump of hibiscus

and vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up.

For a moment Doctor Farnham stood irresolute, and then he gave vent to a shout which startled his three companions almost out of their immortal senses. Across his brain had flashed an inspiration. There must be scores, hundreds, perhaps thousands of men and women killed or badly injured by the earthquake and eruption. He still possessed enough of his anti-death preparation to treat hundreds of persons. He would hurry to the stricken districts near the volcano, and would use the last drop of his priceless compound in restoring life to the dead and dying. At last he could test his discovery on human beings to the limit of his desires, and he would be carrying on a work of humanity and incalculable scientific value at one and the same time. If nothing were gained, nothing would be lost, whereas, if the treatment proved efficacious with human beings, he would have saved countless lives and would have rendered those he treated immortal and forever safe from subsequent eruptions and earthquakes. Partly owing to chance and partly owing to carelessness, the doctor's shabby but thoroughly serviceable car was uninjured, having been left standing in the driveway at

some distance from the buildings. Leaping into it and followed by the uncomprehending three, Doctor Farnham stepped on the gas and dashed toward the mountain slopes above which hung a dense black smoke cloud lit up by vivid flashes of lightning, intermittent bursts of flaming gas, and outbursts of incandescent lava-bombs.

"Not so serious an eruption as I thought," commented the scientist, as the car, bumping over the earthquake-disrupted roads and across cracked culverts and bridges, drew nearer and nearer to the hills. "Apparently largely of local extent," he continued, "no signs of mud flows on this side of the cone — probably ejected on the opposite side towards the sea."

And it must be admitted that, as Doctor Farnham drew near to the still active and threatening volcano, he became somewhat disappointed at finding the catastrophe had been no worse. Not that he was sorry the eruption had caused such a comparatively small amount of damage and loss of life, but because he began to fear that he would have no opportunity to test out his discovery on human beings.

But he need not have worried. Although, as he had assumed, the crater had erupted on the northern side, and the

stupendous masses of red-hot lava and lava-bombs had flowed down the almost uninhabited seaward slopes into the ocean, still several small villages and many isolated houses had been utterly wiped out of existence; scores of persons, both white and black, had been burned to cinders or buried under many feet of ashes and mud; thousands of acres of cultivated fields and gardens had been transformed into barren, desolate steaming seas of mud, and an incalculable amount of damage had been done.

Close to the crater, which since time immemorial had been considered wholly extinct, the destruction, where it had occurred at all, had been complete. Beyond this zone of scalding steam, red-hot cinders and blazing gases, even greater fatalities had occurred through the action of heavy, deadly gases which, descending from the upper strata of air, had left hundreds of asphyxiated human beings in its wake.

But as is almost always the case with volcanic eruptions and phenomena, the death-dealing fumes had taken their toll in a most erratic and inexplicable manner. People had fallen in their tracks by scores in one spot, while within a few yards, none had suffered. One side of a village street had been

swept by the noxious gas, while the opposite side of the narrow thoroughfare had been unaffected, and, when later intelligible reports had been made, it was found that in several instances a man had been overcome and killed while conversing with a friend who had escaped without injury. Of all the settlements which had thus been made the target for the deadly gases, that of San Marco had suffered the most, and as Doctor Farnham and his companions drove into the stricken village the scientist knew that the opportunity of his lifetime had come. Everywhere, the crumpled-up, inert bodies of men and women lay where they had fallen when overcome by the gas from the volcano. They were stretched on the sidewalks and in the street, they lay sprawled on steps and in doorways; the market place and tiny plaza were filled with them, and less than a dozen of the inhabitants of the town remained alive and unhurt. And as these had fled from the gas-stricken village, Doctor Farnham and his three men were the sole living beings in San Marcos. Naturally, the scientist was immensely pleased. There was nobody to interfere with him or to raise foolish and wholly unjustifiable objections to his work. There was a superabundance of material to work on, and subjects

of the most desirable kind for, at his first glance, Doctor Farnham knew that the people had been killed by gas or shock, and that the deaths had not been caused by injuries to vital organs, in which case he would have had less confidence in his treatment. And we cannot blame him for his elation at finding the village strewn with corpses. Why should he have felt sorrow, pity or regret when, in his own mind, he felt positive that he could bring the stricken people back to life, yes, more than life, to a state of immortality? To him they were not dead, but merely in a temporary state of suspended animation, from which they would awaken never to die.

Leaping from his car, and assisted by his three ancient, but lively and energetic companions, Doctor Farnham proceeded methodically to inject the minimum dose of his precious elixir of life into each body in turn. At the very outset, however, he realized that he could not by any possibility restore *all* the dead in the village to life. He did not possess half enough of his compound for that, and he was in a quandary. In the first place, he most ardently desired to retain enough of his material to test it on the bodies of those who, he felt sure, must have met violent deaths nearer the volcano. In the second place, how

could he decide whom to save and bless with immortality and whom to leave?

It was a difficult, hard question to solve, for never before had any one man possessed the power of life and death over so many of his fellows. But he could not devote much time to deciding. He did not know how long a human being could remain dead and be resuscitated, and much precious time had already elapsed since the villagers had been struck down by the gas. Some decision must be made at once, and he made it. Life, he decided, was more important to the younger and more vigorous persons than to the aged, and more desirable to the intelligent and educated individuals than to the ignorant and illiterate. He knew that, broadly speaking, his treatment would result in the persons treated remaining indefinitely in the physical state in which they were at the time of treatment, that even with the slightly renewed vigor and strength which followed, an old man or woman would remain physically old, and, he reasoned, it was very probable that an infant or a child would remain forever undeveloped mentally and physically. Hence, for the good of the world, he would treat the bodies of those who had died in the prime of life — but for the sake of science a few of the children would be

treated as well — permitting the old, the diseased, the maimed and the decrepit to remain dead. In this, he felt he was not acting inhumanely or callously. He could only save a certain number anyway, and those whom he passed by would be no worse off than they were at present, for he had assured himself, by a rapid examination, that according to all medical and known standards the victims were as dead as doornails.

VII

SO, HAVING come to his decision, he hurried about, injecting his compound into the veins of those he deemed worthy to survive, and in the meantime filled with visions of the future, of a race of immortal people developing from the nucleus he had started. Anxious to know the results of his treatment, and to find out how long it took for a dead person to come back to life, Doctor Farnham ordered his three companions to remain behind and watch the bodies of those treated, and to report to him the moment any of the dead showed signs of reviving. He had commenced his work at the plaza, and here he stationed one of the three; at the market he left another, and the third was to be stationed a few blocks farther on. By the time Doctor

Farnham reached the market he had treated several hundred bodies, and yet no word had come from the fellow watching for results at the plaza. Doubts began to assail the scientist as he continued on his way. Perhaps, after all, human beings would not respond to his treatment. Possibly the effects of this particular and unknown gas rendered his treatment valueless. It might be . . .

Terrifying sounds from the rear suddenly interrupted his thoughts. From the direction of the plaza came screams, shouts, a babel of sounds. It had worked! Where a moment before was the silence of death now could be heard the unmistakable sounds of life. The dead had been raised. The impossible had been accomplished, and, forgetting all else in his anxiety to witness the resurrection, Doctor Farnham dropped syringe and vial beside the body he had been about to treat, and hurried towards the plaza.

The sounds were increasing and coming nearer. Of course, he thought, the dead in the market were coming to life. But why, he wondered, had his two men failed to report?

The answer came most unexpectedly. Racing as fast as their old legs could carry them, the two fellows came dashing around a corner, terror on their faces, panting and breathless,

while at their heels came a mob of men and women, screaming, shouting incomprehensible words, waving their arms threateningly, and obviously hostile.

Gasping, hurriedly, the two men tried to explain. "They're mad," exclaimed he who had been stationed at the plaza, "murderin' mad! Lord knows why, but they set on me like tigers. Mauled me something dreadful. How I lived through it I dunno. Cracked me over the head with stones and beat me up."

"Me, too," chimed in the fellow who had been at the market place. "Stuck a machete in me, one fellow did. Looka here!" As he spoke he bared his chest and revealed a three-inch incision over his heart. The doctor, despite the approaching and obviously dangerous mob, gasped. The wound should have killed the fellow, and yet he appeared in no way inconvenienced. Then it dawned upon him. Of course he had not been killed. How could he be killed when he was immortal!

The two men were in no danger. No matter what the mob did they would survive, and Doctor Farnham had a fleeting, instantaneous vision of the two fellows being chopped into bits or torn to pieces and each separate fragment of their anatomies continuing

to live, or perhaps even reuniting to form a complete man again. And bitterly he regretted that he had never tried the treatment on himself. Why hadn't he? For the life of him he didn't know. But there was no time for introspection or regrets. The mob was close now, something must be done. "You can't be hurt," he shouted to his companions. "You are immortal. Nothing can kill you. Don't run, don't be afraid. Face the mob."

But the fellows' confidence in the scientist's treatment and words was not great enough to make them obey, and furtively glancing about for a refuge, they prepared to flee. For a brief instant the doctor thought of facing the mob, of reasoning with them, of explaining why he was there, of quieting them, for he had reasoned that, in all probability, their actions were due to terror and nerve strain; that, reviving, they had been filled with the mad terror of the eruption which had been their last conscious sensations; that seeing many of their fellow men still lying dead they had become panic-stricken, and that their attack on the two watchmen had been merely the unreasoning, unwarranted act of half-crazed, fear-maddened men.

But the scientist's half-formed idea of facing the mob was abandoned almost as soon as

conceived. No one could reason with the crowd. In time the mob would calm down; once they realized the eruption was over they would forget their terrors and would busy themselves burying the remaining dead. For the present, discretion was the better part of valor, and seizing his three companions, for the third fellow had now arrived on the scene, Doctor Farnham ducked around the nearest building and the four raced like mad for the car. But even as they fled, shouts, curses and screams came from the other direction; men and women appeared from streets and dwellings, and scores of resuscitated people rushed forward and fell madly, fiendishly upon the mob from the plaza. Instantly pandemonium reigned, and the four fugitives stood, transfixed with the horror of the scene. Fighting, clawing, biting, stabbing, the people fell upon one another, and the watching four shuddered as they saw men and women, minus arms or hands, faces shapeless masses of pulp, bodies slashed, pierced and torn, still leaping, springing about; still struggling and wholly oblivious to their terrible wounds, for being immortal nothing could destroy them.

Heedless of the dead bodies which had not been resuscitated, the struggling mob swayed here and there, while now and

then — and Doctor Farnham and his men felt faint and sick at the sight — some panting man or woman would leave the milling mob, and springing like a beast on one of the trampled corpses, would tear and devour the flesh.

It was too much! Madly the four raced to the car, leaped in, and unheeding the peril of the road drove towards the distant town.

As they tore along, Doctor Farnham gradually calmed himself and forced his mind to function in its accustomed manner. He could not fully account for the savagery of the resurrected inhabitants of the village, but he could formulate reasonable theories to account for it. "Reversion to ancestral types under stress of great mental strain," he mentally classified it.. "Suddenly finding themselves alive and safe after the impression that they were being destroyed, released inhibitions and gave dormant, savage instinct full rein. A mental explosion as it were. Probably normal calm and other conditions will follow."

But was it not possible — and the scientist trembled at the thought — was it not possible that while his treatment restored life, it did not restore mentality? He had hitherto experimented only with the lower animals, and who could say whether a rabbit or a guinea

pig possessed normal or abnormal mentality after being retrieved from death? Then, through Doctor Farnham's mind came thoughts of the actions of the kitten which he had first resuscitated by his discovery, and he remembered how the beast had spit and scratched and yowled, finally escaping and taking to the brush like a wild thing. Perhaps only the physical organism could be restored to life, and the mental processes remained dead. Perhaps, after all, there *was* such a thing as a soul or spirit and this fled from the body at death and could not be restored. Doctor Farnham shivered despite the sweltering heat of the sun. If this were so, if all the soul or spirit or reason or whatever it was that kept the balance of a human being or an animal, if this inexplicable unknown thing were absent when the dead were revived, then God help the world.

VIII

NO ONE COULD visualize the results. The resurrected dead must continue. They could not even destroy one another. Then, more calmly, and feeling vastly relieved, he tried to cheer himself with the thought that, after all, there might be no basis for his fears. Perhaps the actions of the savage be-

ings back in the village were merely temporary, that possibly, even if mentality or the soul was lacking at first, it would return in time and again fit itself to the resurrected body. No one could say, no one could do more than theorize; but whatever the ultimate result, Doctor Farnham had made up his mind that he would report the matter to the authorities, that regardless of what the consequences might be for him, he would make a clean breast of it, and would do all in his power, would devote all of his fortune and his time to trying to right what he had done, if, as he feared, matters were as bad as they might be.

In this manner came the Plague of the Living Dead, as it was afterwards known. At first, the authorities at Abilene believed that Doctor Farnham and his three companions had gone temporarily mad through the effects of the earthquake and the eruption, and they tried to calm the four and to soothe them. But when, a few hours later, the survivors of a relief party reported that the village and the neighborhood was filled with wild blood-mad savages and that three members of the party had been attacked, killed and torn to pieces, the authorities took action, although they still had no faith in Doctor Farnham's tale, and scoffed at the idea that

he had resuscitated the dead or that the savages were immortal, and considered these the hallucinations of an overwrought mind.

No doubt, they said, the survivors of the catastrophe had been driven mad by the eruption and had reverted to savagery, but it would be a simple matter to round them up, confine them in an asylum and gradually cure them.

But the force of police sent to the vicinity of the village found that neither Doctor Farnham nor the relief party had exaggerated matters in the least. In fact, only two policemen managed to escape, and with terror-filled eyes they told a story of horrors beyond any imagination. They had seen their fellows destroyed before their eyes. They had poured bullets into the bodies of the savage villagers at close range, but with no effect. They had fought hand-to-hand and had seen their short swords bury themselves in their antagonists' flesh without result, and they shuddered as they told of seeing armless, yes, even headless, men fighting like demons.

At last the officials were convinced that something entirely new and inexplicable had occurred. Incredible as it might seem, the doctor's story must be true, and something must be done without delay to rid

the island of its curse — this Plague of the Living Dead. Far into night, and throughout the following day, all the officials of the island sat in conference with the scientist, for, being sensible men, the authorities realized that no one would be so likely to offer a solution of the problem as the man who had brought it about. And very wisely, too. The first suggestion that was made and acted upon was to establish a strict censorship on everything leaving the island. To let the outside world know what had occurred would be most unwise. The press would get hold of it; reporters and others would rush to the island to secure the facts; Abilone would be made the butt of incredulous ridicule or a place accursed, according to whether or not the press and public believed in the reports. But how to establish a censorship, how to prevent outsiders from visiting the island or to prevent the islanders from leaving was the question. This was solved by Doctor Frisbie, the medical inspector of the port. It would be announced that a virulent contagious disease had broken out in a remote village — which was in a way no more than the truth — and that until further notice no vessels would be allowed to enter or leave the ports. Of course, this would entail some hardships, but the available

supplies of food were sufficient to support the population for at least several months, and long before the expiration of that period it was hoped that the Living Dead would be eliminated. But as time passed, those upon Abilone began to fear that no human power could conquer the soulless automatons in human form who cursed the land and could not be destroyed. Luckily, being absolutely lacking in intelligence and with no reasoning powers, the things did not wander far, and showed no inclination to leave their original district to attack persons who did not bother them. And to prevent any possibility of their spreading, immense barriers of barbed wire were erected about the locality where the Living Dead held sway.

As Doctor Farnham had pointed out, the barbed wire would not deter the things through the pain or injuries caused by its jagged points, and hence the fence was erected for strength and height, and formed a barrier which even elephants could scarcely have broken through. This, however, took time, and long before it was completed innumerable attempts had been made to surround and capture or to destroy the soulless beings, for so fixed are certain ideas in the human brain that the officials could not believe that the Liv-

ing Dead could not be killed, despite the arguments of Doctor Farnham who, over and over again, declared that it was a waste of money and life to attempt to annihilate the beings he had resurrected. But, of course, every attempt was futile. Bullets had no effect upon them, and when, after many arguments and innumerable protests, it was decided that, as the beings were no better than wild beasts and, therefore, a menace to the world, any means were justifiable, preparations were made to burn them out. Innumerable fires were kindled, and before a fresh wind the flames swept across the entire area occupied by the Living Dead and reduced the last vestiges of their former village to ashes. But, when, the fire over, a detachment of police was sent into the district to count the bodies, they were attacked, almost annihilated and driven back by the horde of singed, mutilated, ghastly beings who had survived powder and ball, poison gases, and every other means to destroy them. Next, it was suggested that they be drowned, and although Doctor Farnham openly scoffed at the idea and the expense involved, no one could be made to believe that things were really immune to death in any form whatsoever. Hence, at a terrific expense, a dam was built across

the river flowing through the district, and for days the entire area was flooded. But at the end of the time the Living Dead were as lively, as savage, as unreasoning and as great a plague as ever. Strangely enough, too, not one of the beings had ever been captured. On two occasions, to be sure, members of the band had been seized, but on each occasion the beings had literally torn themselves free, leaving a dismembered arm or hand in possession of their captors. And these fragments of flesh, to everyone's horror and amazement, had continued to live.

It was indescribably gruesome to see the dismembered arm twisting and writhing about, to see the muscles flexing and the fingers opening and closing. Even when placed in jars of alcohol or formaldehyde, the limbs continued to retain their life and movement, and at last, in sheer desperation, the officials buried them in masses of concrete where, so far as they were concerned, the immortal fragments of anatomy might continue to survive and writhe until the crack of doom.

IX

INTENSIVE STUDIES and observations of the Living Dead had been made, however, and at last it was conceded

that Doctor Farnham had been right and had not in the least overestimated the attributes of the beings. And it was also admitted that his theories regarding their condition and actions were in the main correct. They could not be killed by any known means; that had been conclusively proved. They could exist without apparent ill effects even when horribly mutilated and even headless. They could literally be cut to pieces and each fragment would continue to live, and if two of these pieces came into contact, they would reunite and grow into monstrous, nightmarish, terrible things. Watching the area within the barrier through powerful glasses, the observers saw many of these things. Once, a head which had joined to two arms and a leg went racing across an open space like a monstrous spider. On another occasion a body appeared minus legs, and with two additional heads growing from the shoulders from which the original arms had been severed. And many of the fairly whole beings had hands, fingers, feet or other portions of anatomy growing from wounds upon various parts of their bodies. For the Living Dead, having no reasoning powers, yet instinctively sought to replace any portions of their bodies which they had lost, and picked up the first human fragment

they found and grafted it into any wound or raw surface of their flesh. Strangely enough, too, although it was perfectly logical once the matter was given thought, those individuals who were minus heads appeared fully as well off as those whose heads remained upon their shoulders, for without any glimmerings of intelligence, without reason and merely flesh and blood machines uncontrolled by brains, the Living Dead had no real need of heads. Nevertheless, they seemed to have some strange subconscious idea that heads were desirable, and fierce battles took place over the possession of a head which two of the things discovered simultaneously. Very frequently, the head, when re-established upon a body, was back-side-to, and a large percentage of the beings wore heads which did not originally belong to them. Moreover, the beings became head-hunters, and lopping off one another's heads became their chief diversion or occupation.

The amazing speed with which the most ghastly wound healed, and the incredibly short period of time required for a limb or head to graft itself firmly in place, were downright uncanny, but were accounted for by Doctor Farnham who explained that whereas, ordinarily, the tissues of normal human beings partially

die and must be replaced by new growths, the tissues of the Living Dead remained alive, active and with all their cells intact, and hence instantly reunited, while at the same time, septic infection and injurious microbes could find no opportunity to act upon healthy living tissues. Although at first the beings had struggled and fought night and day, yet as time passed, they became more peaceable and seldom battled among themselves. When this was first observed, the authorities were hopeful of the beings eventually becoming rational, but Doctor Farnham disillusioned them and was borne out in his statement by the island's medical and scientific men.

"It is the logical and to-be-expected result," he declared. "In the first place, being without reason or the powers of deduction, and not being able to profit by experience, they have merely exhausted their powers of fighting. And, in the second place, a large proportion of their numbers are composites. That is, they have arms, limbs, heads or other portions of their anatomy belonging to other individuals. Hence to attack another being would be equivalent to attacking themselves. It is not a question of either instinct or brain, but merely the reaction of muscles and nerves to the inexplicable but long recognized cellular

recognition or affinity existing in all organic matter."

At first, too, it had been thought that the Living Dead could be starved to death, or if truly immortal, that they could be so weakened by lack of food that they could easily be captured. But here again, the authorities had overlooked the basic features of the case. Although the creatures now and then devoured one another — and Doctor Farnham wondered what happened when an unkillable being was devoured by his fellows — yet this cannibalism seemed more a purely instinctive act than a necessity. The headless members of the community could not, of course, eat, but they got along just as well, and at last it dawned upon the officials that when a creature is truly immortal, nothing mortal can affect it.

Meanwhile, the island was getting perilously short of provisions and the people were being put on rations. Very soon, all knew, it would be necessary to allow a vessel to enter the port to bring in supplies, and the quarantine, moreover, could not much longer be maintained without arousing suspicion. Of course, long before this, the government had come to a realization of the fact that the terrible secret of the island could not be kept indefinitely. But the authorities had hoped that the Plague of the Living

Dead might be forever removed before it became necessary to apprise the world at large of the curse which had fallen upon Abilone.

Had it not been for its isolated position, and the fact that news of the eruption had reached the outer world and the public had assumed that the reported epidemic was the direct result of this, the true facts of the case would have become public property long ago.

Now, however, the authorities were at their wits' end. They had tried every means to exterminate the Living Dead without success. They had devoted a fortune and had sacrificed many lives trying to capture the terrible things, all without avail. And Doctor Farnham had, so far, been unable to suggest a means of ridding the island and the world of the incubus he had so unfortunately put upon it.

This, then, was the status of the case when, on a certain night, the officials had gathered in conference to pass upon the question of lifting the quarantine and giving up in despair, trusting to keeping the Living Dead confined indefinitely within the wire barrier.

"That," declared Colonel Shoreham, the military commandant, "is, or rather will be, impossible. So far, thank God, the things have made no attempt to tear down or scale

the barrier, but sooner or later, they will. If they possessed reason they would have done so long ago, but some day — perhaps tomorrow, perhaps not for a century — they will decide to move, and the stoutest barricade man can erect will not hold them in check. Why, one of those spider-like monsters, consisting of legs and arms, could clamber over the wire as readily as a fly can walk on yonder wall. And do not forget, gentlemen, that water is no barrier to these terrible beings. They cannot be drowned, and hence they may be carried by sea to distant lands and may spread to the uttermost ends of the earth. Terrible and blasphemous as it may sound, I wish to God that another eruption might occur and that a volcano might break forth under the Living Dead and blow them into space. Personally —"

He was interrupted by a shout from Doctor Farnham, who, leaping to his feet, excitedly drew the attention of everyone to himself.

"Colonell!" he cried, "to you belongs the credit of having solved the problem. You spoke of blowing the Living Dead into space. That, gentlemen, is the solution. We will not need to invoke Divine aid in creating the volcano to do this, but we will provide the means ourselves."

The others looked at one an-

other and at the enthusiastic scientist in utter amazement. Had his worries driven him mad? What was he driving at?

X

BUT Doctor Farnham was most evidently sane and most obviously in earnest. "I quite realize how visionary the idea may appear to you, gentlemen," he said, striving to speak calmly. "But I think you will all accept it after my most unfortunate discovery, which resulted, it is true, in our present predicament, but which, nevertheless, proved that the most visionary and seemingly impossible things may be possible. I feel sure, I repeat, that after what you have all seen, you will agree with me that my present scheme is not either visionary or impossible. Briefly, gentlemen, it is to construct an immense cannon, or perhaps better, an artificial crater, beneath the Living Dead and blow every one of the beings into space. In fact, blow them to such an immense distance that they will be beyond the attraction of Earth and will forever revolve, like satellites, about our planet."

As he finished, silence fell upon those present. A few weeks previously they would have jeered, scoffed, ridiculed the idea or would have felt sure he was mad. But too many

seemingly insane things had occurred to warrant a hasty judgment, and all were thinking deeply. At last, a dignified white-haired gentleman rose to his feet and cleared his throat. He was Senor Martinez, a descendant of one of the old Spanish families who had originally owned the island, and a retired engineer of world-wide fame.

"I feel," he began, "that Doctor Farnham's suggestion might be carried out. I have only two questions in my mind as to its feasibility. First; the cost of the undertaking which would be prodigious — far more than the somewhat depleted treasury of Abilene would permit. And second; by what form of explosive the force could be generated which would project the beings so far that they would not fall back upon Earth, and being immortal, still be living things?"

"The expense," announced Doctor Farnham, as Senor Martinez resumed his seat, "will be borne by me. My fortune, which originally amounted to something over three millions, has remained practically untouched for the past forty-five years, for I have expended but a small fraction of the income. As it was entirely due to my work that the Plague of the Living Dead has been brought upon your island, I feel that it is no more than just that I should devote my last cent and

my last effort to righting the wrong. As for the explosive, Senor Martinez, that will be a combination of nature's forces and modern high-power explosives. Beneath the area occupied by the Living Dead is a deep-seated fissure connecting, in all probability, with the Sugar Loaf volcano. By excavating and tunneling we will enlarge that fissure to form an immense hollow under the area we desire to destroy, and we will fill the hollow with all the highest explosives known to science, and which can be purchased with my wealth. In the meantime, the San Marco River will be diverted from its present course and will be led to a tunnel which will be cut through the rim of the old crater. By means of electricity we will arrange to explode the charge under the Living Dead at the precise instant when the water of the river is released, and emptying into the crater, creates a steam pressure sufficient to produce an eruption. That pressure, gentlemen, being released by the detonation of the explosives will unquestioningly follow the line of least resistance and will burst forth as a violent sporadic eruption coincidentally with the force of the explosives, and will, I feel sure, project the Living Dead beyond the attraction of our planet."

For a brief instant silence

followed the scientist's words, and then the hall echoed to uproarious applause.

When the demonstrations had at last subsided, the elderly engineer again spoke. "As an engineer, I approve most heartily of Doctor Farnham's ideas," he announced. "A few years ago such an undertaking would have been impossible, but science in many lines has advanced by leaps and bounds. We know the exact pressure generated by water in contact with molten igneous rocks at various depths — thanks to the researches of Signor Barnardi and Professor Svenson, who devoted several years to intensive studies of volcanic activities in their respective countries of Italy and Iceland. We now know the exact pressure of steam essential to produce a volcanic eruption, and we also know the precise temperature at that steam pressure. Hence it will be a comparatively simple matter to devise means of detonating explosives coincidentally with the eruptive forces, as Doctor Farnham has outlined. Also, the modern explosives, which I presume would be the recently discovered YLT, and the even more powerful Mozanite, have already proved to possess sufficient force to project a missile several thousand miles beyond Earth's atmosphere, and in all probability, beyond the attractive forces of

our sphere. The one really great difficulty which I foresee will be to calculate the exact diameter and depth of the excavation and to confine the Living Dead to the area immediately above it. I am most happy, gentlemen, to offer my poor services in this cause, and if you desire it, I will most gladly place my knowledge of engineering at the disposal of the government and will be honored by collaborating with Doctor Farnham."

Amid vociferous applause Senor Martinez took his chair, and the governor rose and thanked him and accepted his offer. He was followed by Colonel Shoreham, who expressed his gratification in having inadvertently suggested the means of destroying the Living Dead, and who offered a plan for confining the beings to the restricted area desired. "It is possible, I think," he said, "to gradually push the wire barrier nearer and nearer the selected spot. It will, I take it, require some considerable time to complete excavations and prepare for the grand finale, and in the interim we can move the barrier forward an inch or two at a time. As the Living Dead have no intelligence they will never notice the change, and even if they do they will not understand what it means. As soon as Doctor Farnham and Senor Martinez have decided upon the

exact spot, and the extent of the area to be blown up, I will commence moving the barrier."

This suggestion appeared to solve the last difficulty, and, vastly relieved that at last there seemed to be hopes of forever destroying the Plague of the Living Dead, the meeting broke up after voting *carte blanche* to those who had volunteered to see the scheme through.

There is little more to be told. Everything proceeded smoothly. The precise area which was to be blown into space was determined, and true to his word, Colonel Shoreham moved the steel barrier forward until the inhuman, though human, monsters within were confined to the selected spot. Meanwhile, with millions at their disposal, the engineer and his assistants diverted the San Marco River, cut a tunnel through the base of the thin outer rim of the crater, and held the pent-up stream in check by a dam which could be destroyed by a single explosion set off by an electrical connection and detonator. Beneath the doomed beings, great electrically-driven machines were tunneling deep into the bowels of the mountain slope, and each hour, as the excavation deepened, the heat increased and scalding steam jets were more frequently met, all of which was most promising as

proving that the active crater was not many feet below the spot wherein the work was going on. At last Senor Martinez feared to go deeper. Beneath the vast hole the roaring and rumbling of the volcano's forces could be heard; the steam issued from every crevice and crack in the rocks, and the temperature registered over two hundred degrees. Carefully, hundreds of tons of the most powerful of up-to-date explosives were piled within the vast excavation — tons of the recently discovered Y.L.T., which had entirely superseded TNT and was nearly one hundred times as powerful, and tons of the even more powerful Mozanite — until the cavity was completely filled with the explosives. At last all was in readiness. Delicate instruments had been placed deep within the crater, instruments which at predetermined temperatures would send a charge of electricity to the detonating caps in the explosive-filled excavations, and instruments which would accomplish the same result when the steam pressure reached a prearranged pressure.

XI

FOR WEEKS, the inhabitants had been warned away from the vicinity of activities, though there was little need of this, for few persons cared

to visit that portion of the island. And in order that persons in distant parts of the island might not be unduly alarmed, notices had been posted stating that at any time a stupendous explosion might occur, but which would cause no damage to outlying districts. Far more excited and nervous than they had ever been in their lives, the officials, together with the engineer and Doctor Farnham, waited within their bomb-proof shelter several miles from the area of the Living Dead, for the last act in the stupendous drama.

Without a hitch the dam was blown up, and the vast torrent of water rushed in a mighty cataract through the crater wall and into the depths of the volcano. Even from where they watched, the officials could see the far-flung white cloud of steam that instantly arose from the towering mountain top. One minute passed, two, three — With a roar that seemed to split heaven and earth, with a shock that threw every man to the ground, the entire side of the mountain seemed to rise in air. A blinding glare that dulled the midday sun clove the sky; a pillar of smoke that shot upward to the zenith blotted sun and sky from sight, and for miles around, the earth was split, rent and riven. Streams overflowed their banks; land-

slides came crashing down mountain sides; forest trees were splintered into matchwood. Birds were killed in midair by the concussion, and for days afterwards, dead fish floated by thousands upon the surface of the sea. To those in the bombproof shelter, it seemed as if the explosion would never end, as if the mightiest of the volcano's forces had been conjured from the bowels of the earth and might never cease to erupt. And for what seemed hours, no debris, no stones or pulverized earth and rocks came tumbling back to earth. But at last — in reality but a few moments after the explosion — thousands of tons of broken rock, of splintered trees, of ash and mud, of impalpable dust came crashing, pattering, until at last all was still — not a sound was heard.

Awed and shaken, the watchers, accompanied by a band of armed troops, made their way to the devastated area.

A vast new crater yawned where the Living Dead had been. For half a dozen miles about, the island was littered with debris; but nowhere could a trace be found of the terrible beings.

And as no one, anywhere, has ever reported finding one of the monsters, or any fragments of their immortal bodies, it is safe to assume that somewhere, far beyond Earth's at-

traction, the Living Dead, blown to infinitesimal atoms, are doomed to forever remain suspended in space.

The terrific explosion, which was reported by ships at sea and which was plainly heard at Roque over fifty miles distant, was passed off as a natural, but harmless eruption of Sugar Loaf volcano.

As for Doctor Farnham, with the several thousands of dollars left from his fortune, he built a church and a hospital, and he still resides quietly in Abilene, devoting his talents and his knowledge to healing the sick and relieving the suffering. His three human experiments are still with him. Never have they divulged what they know, and never do they mention the fact that they were subjected to the doctor's treatment, for they have got the idea that if the officials should discover they are immortal, they would meet the same fate as the Living Dead.

As far as can be seen or determined, they are as lively and chipper as ever, but whether they are fated to live on forever, or whether their span of life has merely been extended, no one can say. At any rate, the oldest fellow has made his will, and the other two are in constant dread of being killed by motor cars. So, being immortal does not, apparently, rid a person of the fear of death.

It Is Written . . .

LETTERS ARE still coming in on the April issue as this is being typed, and the preference page shows increasing use. So far, however, there has been very little comment on the cover, and what there has been has been pretty well split down the middle. Apparently only those who liked it very much, and those who disliked it very much, commented. This cover symbolized the Ray Cummings novelet. There are two questions on the preference page, and it would be helpful if you all gave some sort of reply.

How much effect might your comments have upon future covers, you may ask? This is a very intangible thing, but I'll give you as straight an answer as possible. Suppose (happy thought) that this issue you are now reading shows a marked increase in sales, and at the same time a definite majority of you who vote show a liking for the cover. We could then conclude tentatively that this sort of cover has a relationship to better sales — assuming, of course, that in this period we did not suddenly get a better break in distribution then we've been able to get so far. Wider distribution alone *could* account for better sales, since there is an indefinite number of people who might try MOH even if they were not enthusiastic about the cover on this issue, if they just saw it on sale.

Suppose (sob) sales fell off and simultaneously the voting readers showed a definite majority dislike

of the cover. Then it would be possible to make a tie-in — assuming, of course, that we did not have a simultaneous setback in the continuous distribution struggle. This is the sort of situation which we hope to see in every issue — where a rise in sales corresponds with expressed approval on various aspects of the issue (or, should misfortune strike, a simultaneous expression of dislike) so that your opinions would tie in with sales to a reasonable degree.

Usually, this sort of thing does not happen; a highly-praised issue might not sell particularly well (or even badly) while one which brought forth little praise might sell well. So far as covers go — well, we do not use any which we consider to be poor in the first place, but some are decidedly better in our eyes than others. Here, too, the sales reports often seem to have very little relationship to what we thought, or what you told us, was one of the better covers. Sometimes some of what we thought to be the least worthy have sold best. However, this does not happen often enough to tempt us to use what we consider to be less good covers on a deliberate policy basis. Err we must, since we are not perfect, but we shall have done so unwittingly when it happens.

Speaking of errors, we made a whiz in the blurb for David Grinnell's story, *The Garrison*, telling you that the Grinnell novel, *Des-*

Any's Orbit, is in the same Ace Book that contains Ray Cummings' *Wandl, the Invader* (D497). Wrong! *Destiny's Orbit* is combined with John Brunner's delightful *Times Without Number* (F161), while the Cummings novel appears along with *I Speak For Earth*, by Keith Woodcott — about which we cannot comment, not having read it. Well, the number of the book was correctly given, at least; and thanks to James Edward Turner, who was the first of several readers to correct us on this error.

Votes continue to come in on both sides of the question of offering you further reprints by H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and Edgar Allan Poe, while softcover collections containing stories by two of the three continue to appear. We shall offer you these authors, however, if there are stories by them that you have specifically requested, providing these particular stories are not, to our knowledge, available in a softcover collection that has appeared within the last few years. If such available stories are requested, we shall try to let you know where they can be found.

In the same category lie several stories by WEIRD TALES authors which several of you have asked

for, and which we had in mind for you until we saw two softcover collections from WT, published by Pyramid Books, 444 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 100022, and selling for 50c the copy. The first, *Weird Tales* (R-1029) contains: *The Man Who Returned*, by Edmond Hamilton; *Spider Manston*, by Fritz Leiber, Jr.; *A Question of Etiquette*, by Robert Bloch; *The Sea Witch*, by Nictzin Dyalhis; *The Strange High House in the Mist*, by H. P. Lovecraft; *The Drifting Snow*, by August Derleth; *The Body Masters*, by Frank Belknap Long; and *Pigeons From Hell*, by Robert E. Howard. The Dyalhis, Lovecraft, and Howard stories appear several times on our request list. The second collection is titled *Worlds of Weird* (R-1125) and contains: *Roads* by Seabury Quinn; *The Sapphire Goddess*, by Nictzin Dyalhis; *The Valley of the Worm*, by Robert E. Howard; *He That Hath Wings*, by Edmond Hamilton; *Mother of Toads*, by Clark Ashton Smith; *The Thing in the Cellar*, by David H. Keller, M.D.; and *Giants in the Sky*, by Frank Belknap Long; and Sam Moskowitz's introduction, relating heretofore unknown facts about the genesis of WEIRD TALES is most valuable. Numbers of you

Many readers inform us that they are unable to find MAGAZINE OF HORROR on their local newsstands. We are doing everything we can in order to rectify this deplorable situation, but there are limits to what we can do. If your local dealer cannot obtain MOH for you, why not take advantage of our subscription offer on page 128 of this issue, which also tells about back issues and their contents? It is not required that you fill out this form in order to subscribe, and save money. Just be sure that your name and address are clearly printed, and that you let us know the date of the latest issue you have, so we can start your subscription with the following number.

had asked for the Quinn, Dyalhis, Howard, Smith, and Keller stories.

Donald A. Wollheim informs us: "Chambers' *Passeur* appeared in his book, *The Mystery of Choice*, 1897, Appleton — the only other collection of his that rivals *The King in Yellow*, though *The Maker of Moons* has its points also.

"You're doing a good job with the magazine, even if 'Bizarre' is spelled somewhat oddly."

Yes — naturally, that misspelling "Bizzarre" was the first thing that caught our eyes when we saw finished copies of the April issue. I wish I could blame the printer, but — alas — it was there staring me in the face on the original cover proof and no one here noticed it.

Frederic van Norstrand writes from San Francisco: "At long last I have found, in C. A. Tomsicek, one who agrees with me as to the 'rambling redundancy' of Henry James, the American would-be Englishman whose boring novels my late mother used to dote on and who, like him, was a social climber. His *Turn of the Screw* is a vapid charivari of involved and wordy drivel, a lullaby like the twin screws of an ocean liner churning the ocean, or I might compare it to a corkscrew that one pulls out of a bottle with a dull plop! — and there's nothing in the bottle! James is in the same category as Marcel Proust: reams of involved verbiage, flocks of words signifying *nothing*! The passe R. W. Chambers is mostly if not entirely in this same regiment of much-touted authors marching toward nowhere."

Joe Kurina writes from Clifton, New Jersey: "*The Hand of Glory* was an excellent piece of weird verse. Any more of this type would certainly be welcome.

"Would like to see Seabury

Quinn's *Globe of Memories* and *Masked Ball*. In fact, any of Quinn's works would be vastly appreciated by myself and, I'm sure, the great majority of your readers. Keep up the good work."

Seabury Quinn retains his position in the affections of readers of weird fiction, and you have already noted that we have a lesser-known story in this issue. And we have a still less widely known tale forthcoming — one which appeared in a fan magazine a few years back.

Praising *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, Keith Darland writes from Ontario, "This story was clever, original, horrifying, and it had a point; it had a purpose. The part-human motivations of the rodent character reminded me of another story which has a somewhat similar purpose, *Later Than You Think*, by Fritz Leiber (found in Derleth's anthology, *Far Boundaries*); you might reprint it."

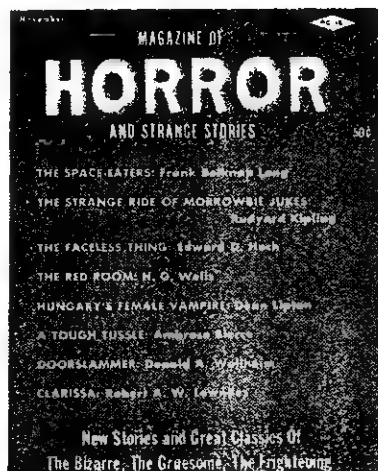
"MOH should, in my opinion, be kept strictly *weird*, as it is pure entertainment, and is the only magazine of its type now on the market," writes Miss Louise Field Avery, from Syracuse, New York. This reminds us of the running argument in the old *WEIRD TALES* as to what *and* what was not a weird tale. Our subtitle indicates that in addition to "horror" stories, we offer tales of the bizarre, the gruesome, and the frightening. Some stories which would certainly qualify, then, would not necessarily fit the first definition of the word "weird" in the *American College Dictionary*, which is our source: "involving the supernatural; unearthly or uncanny." *The Black Laugh*, which for example, was highly favored by most of you, the readers, doesn't come under this heading. What would seem to us to be excluded, however, would be

crime stories, however singular — tales which could just as well appear in a detective or mystery magazine, with a possible exception for a story where the accent is on horror rather than the crime and solution of the mystery, etc. We were one of the many who thought that some of the crime-terror tales that WT published now and then — trying to compete with the sadism-slanted competition, *Terror Tales*, etc. — did not belong in WT. (A reader requests an article about the real mystery from which Poe derived his tale, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*; but this is the sort of material we feel does not belong in MOH, and you readers have agreed in an overwhelming majority.)

"I came to the science fiction/fantasy field a little too late to really enjoy Ray Cummings," writes a California reader who requests anonymity. "Oh, I read the reprints of his Munsey yarns in *FUTURE*, and *FANTASTIC NOVELS* all right, but they were too dated, even then, to be enjoyed without a mountain of reservations — or it seemed to me. I've always regretted it. I'm sure that if I'd just commenced reading the magazines a couple or three years earlier, or been born in '26 instead of '29, I would have loved his stuff. *The Dead Who Walk*, though, is quite an enjoyable yarn. Impossible — I keep thinking of all the cellular breakdown the corpses must have experienced — but fascinating in a wild, half-convincing way."

What would have made the story, as it is written, impossible in 1965 is the simple fact that today you wouldn't have burials of all these deceased without embalming, as Reader van Norstrand noted in his letter to us, from which we quoted another section. As to cellular breakdown, considering the short periods of time in which the corpses were

Have You Missed Any of Our Earlier Issues?



Aug. 1963: *The Man With A Thousand Legs* by Frank Belknap Long; *The Yellow Sign* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Unbeliever* by Robert Silverberg; *The Last Dawn* by Frank Lillie Pollock; *Babylon: 70 M.* by Donald A. Wollheim; *The Maze and the Monster* by Edward D. Hoch.

Nov. 1963: *Clarissa* by Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Space-Eaters* by Frank Belknap Long; *The Charmer* by Archie Binns; *The Faceless Thing* by Edward D. Hoch; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes* by Rudyard Kipling; *The Electric Chair* by George Wright.

Feb. 1964: *The Seeds of Death* by David H. Keller; *The Repairer of Reputations* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Place of the Pythons* by Arthur J. Burks; *The Seeking Thing* by Janet Hirsch; *They That Wait* by H. S. W. Chibbett; *Jean Bouchon* by S. Baring-Gould; *Luel-la Miller* by Mary Wilkins-Freeman.

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Have You Missed Any of Our Earlier Issues?

May 1964: *The Dreams in the Witch-House* by H. P. Lovecraft; *The Mark of the Beast* by Rudyard Kipling; *What Was It?* by Fitz-James Obrien; *Beyond the Breakers* by Anna Hunger; *A Dream of Falling* by Attila Hatvany; *The Truth About Pycraft* by H. G. Wells; *Last Act: October* by Tigrina.

Sept. 1964: *Cassius* by Henry S. Whitehead; *The Ghostly Rental* by Henry James; *The House of the Worm* by Merle Prout; *Five-Year Contract* by J. Vernon Shea; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing* by Walt Liebscher; *Bones* by Donald A. Wollheim.

Nov. 1964: *Caverns of Horror* by Laurence Manning; *The Mask* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Pacer* by August Derleth; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Wards* by Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Door to Saturn* by Clark Ashton Smith; *The Moth* by H. G. Wells.

Jan. 1965: *The Shuttered Room* by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth; *The Phantom Farmhouse* by Seabury Quinn; *The Thing From Outside* by George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight* by Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Shadows on the Wall* by Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Oblong Box* by Edgar Allan Poe.

Apr. 1965: *The Dead Who Walk* by Ray Cummings; *The Hand of Glory* by R. H. D. Barham; *The Black Laugh* by William J. Makin; *Orpheus's Brother* by John Brunner; *The Burglar-Proof Vault* by Oliver Taylor; *Jack* by Reynold Junker.

June 1965: *The Whistling Room* by William Hope Hodgson; *Skulls in the Stars* by Robert E. Howard; *The Distortion out of Space* by Francis Flagg; *The Night Wire* by H. F. Arnold; *Sacrilege* by Wallace West.

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really "dead", this might not be so great as to make revival of the sort Cummings describes, absolutely out of the question. You'll recall that a number of the corpses were in very bad condition anyway, and very likely could not have been kept in business very long even if our heroes hadn't gotten to them. . . . Oddly enough, some readers considered *The Dead Who Walk* science fiction! We think this would require a very special definition of science fiction.

Hank Luttrell writes from Kirkwood, Missouri: "Just before reading Ray Cummings' story in this issue, I had read some of Damon Knight's comments on him. I expected to read hackwork, and I did, I think. But — I enjoyed it. I really did. I think the writing at the very least was smooth and interesting, and the plot well worked out. The characters have very little real life, but I think the story is nonetheless very successful. I think Cummings' constant reminding the reader that the supernatural may be just natural laws which we don't understand was well in keeping with the story, and I like to see this way of thinking in weird stories. It is the way of thinking I like to believe I support.

"This was a very good issue. Think I'll rate the rest of the stories like this: *Jack*, *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, *The Black Laugh*, *The Hand of Glory* (I thought this was particularly good. I wish to stress this as you implied that poetry was something of an experiment in this issue. I don't rate it higher because — well, I liked the others better. More of this by all means.) *The Garrison*, *Passeur*, *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*, *Orpheus's Brother*. I think this was rather poor for Brunner. I would like to see more of Brunner in your pages, however. I hope he is able to do better."

Coming Next Issue

A strange and disturbing sensation diverted Mason's attention to himself, all at once. His mind was drawn absolutely away, for the moment, from those savage, ominous howls from the woods. With unpleasant suddenness he realized that his left foot and leg were prickling painfully, as if they had "gone to sleep." A vigorous stamp to restore circulation moved him to a cry of amazement and dismay, for when he stamped, the tan oxford at the extremity of his left leg flew from the foot and across the room, striking the opposite wall and dropping behind Harry's tumbled bed.

Also, Mason completely lost his balance; went heavily on the floor on his back. As he instinctively flung his head forward to save it from the severe blow it must otherwise have sustained, he beheld a strange, an incredible sight. His right foot was neatly clad in silk sock and well-polished tan oxford, but the sock on the left foot was wrinkled, slipping; the oxford had already flown through the air. As he went down, the limp sock followed the shoe.

Mason Hardy lay on the floor a full sixty seconds before he dared raise himself to a sitting posture and hitch into full moonlight for another look at what he felt he simply could not have seen, because it was altogether too incredible. He closed his eyes, blinked them rapidly once or twice, then opened them directly upon that prickling left foot and leg. The blue eyes widened amazedly then, for what he saw only too plainly was the slim, hairy leg of an animal, with a well-padded nailed paw at the extremity.

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129

Reader's Preference Page

(there's more space on the flip side)

Please rate the stories in the order of your preference, as many as possible. Ties are always acceptable. If you thought a story was bad (rather than just last place), put an "X" beside it. If you thought a story was truly outstanding, above just first place, mark an "O" beside it. (Then the next-best would be "1".)

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THE CLOTH OF MADNESS

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